

Approaching the Real through Magic Realism:
Magic Realism in Contemporary Indian Literature in English

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ABSTRACT

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In this thesis I examine the workings of magic realism in the novels of three Indian novelists writing in English: R.K.Narayan, Salman Rushdie, and Arundhati Roy. I start with a review of the literature on magic realism. In Chapter I, I propose to read Narayan as a magic realist writer. His style helps understand the mode as an attitude to reality preexisting the theorization on the mode. In the following two chapters, I contend with the major reservations critics have expressed about the trend. In Chapter II, the focus will be on the issue of escapism which is undermined by the political and social dimension of some of Rushdie's novels. Chapter III deals with the way Roy's work subverts the claim that the mode is necessarily exoticizing as she subverts the exotic potential while continuing to deploy magic realism.

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I dedicate my work to P'a and M'a: I do not need to write what I thank you for.

Samy, Sherine, Ridha, and Pitchoune who are always around me despite distance.

It also goes to those who are always on my mind: Mamy, the rest of my family, and my friends.

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Introduction

Preamble

Much has been written about magic realism. However, it has never been easy to give a clear definition to the term and trend, in part because of the various uses and the changing roles that it has acquired in different works. Definitions are often either too inclusive or too exclusive. Some critics have even suggested doing away with the term. But what prompted this thesis is that despite the shortcomings which opponents of the mode emphasize (such as the above vagueness), magic realism has had quite an important influence on the writing of some novelists as well as on literary criticism and theory. There have been exponents from different parts of the world but I propose to deal specifically with magic realism in Indian literature from a postcolonial perspective. This is no attempt to assign an exclusively postcolonial nature to the trend. Still, it has specific implications when viewed from a postcolonial perspective. I will study the presence of magic realism in three Indian authors and the change that the trend itself has undergone at the hands of these novelists, namely R. K. Narayan, Salman Rushdie, and Arundhati Roy.

Although the origins of magic realism can be traced back to earlier times, the term was first coined by Franz Roh in 1925 to describe a tendency in German painting in the early twenties. Later, Surrealism spread and encompassed European painting, literature, and filmmaking. Among the artists forming the Parisian Surrealist group was Alejo Carpentier, the Cuban writer who was to develop what was seen as an adapted Latin American version of Surrealism -“lo real maravilloso americano”- or the notion that the

marvelous is an inherent feature of Latin American land (Carpentier, 86). His articles are often considered a basic text in the literature on magic realism. What ensued was the so-called Latin American boom in the Sixties and Seventies whereby many writers were clearly identified as magic realist -such as Gabriel García Márquez and Carlos Fuentes. Some characteristics of the trend were identified as the “mingling and juxtaposition of the realistic and the fantastic or bizarre, skillful time shifts, convoluted and even labyrinthine narratives and plots, miscellaneous use of dreams, myths and fairy stories” (Cuddon, 488). The use of the term expanded to encompass novels emanating from other geographical areas and increasingly mentioned in postcolonial criticism to refer to literature that draws on pre-colonial culture and integrates local myths in order to “interrogate the assumptions of Western, rational, linear narratives” (Ashcroft, 133).

From a postcolonial perspective, magic realism came to represent a questioning of the dogma of enlightenment philosophy that fueled a binary vision of the world whereby the rational and the connotation of progress was necessarily associated with the West. Instead of presenting magic and reality in opposition, they are shown to be fused so that the irrational is as much part of reality as the rational.

The integration of magic and realism is not a new phenomenon but the recent theorization has had an influence on its use which partly accounts for the different approaches to the trend in the three authors under study. Despite the overlapping of these writers' works, they are perceived as belonging to three generations. R. K. Narayan, for instance, is rarely analyzed from a magic realist perspective. However, I will show in Chapter II that

part of his work does fit in some definitions of magic realism and helps understand the mode as an attitude towards reality before even being a theorized trend. As critics seized upon the term and celebrated Salman Rushdie as the Indian exponent of magic realism, a number of opponents also started raising questions as to the efficiency of magic realism in a postcolonial literary context, pointing to what they see as the escapist nature and the exoticism of the trend. In Chapter III, I will contend with the claim that magic realism is inherently escapist by showing how it serves political and social criticism in Rushdie's *Midnight's Children*, *Shame*, and *The Moor's Last Sigh*. The issue of exoticism will be dealt with in Chapter IV in relation to Arundhati Roy's novel *The God of Small Things*. Arundhati Roy has been described as the representative of a new generation of Indian writers rejecting magic realism and its exoticist connotations. Yet, as I will first show in the chapter, Roy's novel presents instances of magic realism that have significant implications in the narrative as a whole. My second concern in this chapter is to argue that the charge of exoticism associated with the form is here countered as the author uses the exotic strategically (i.e. exotic images are presented and subverted). With Roy the way the form is deployed differs from earlier illustrations in Rushdie's novels and goes beyond some of the early definitions. So here again (as is the case for Narayan), magic realism is not necessarily followed as a strict literary form but as an attitude or approach to reality.

Definitions and criticism

In a post-independence context, Realism has been perceived as a representative of the rationalism associated not only with the colonizer but also with the colonizing project and

civilizing mission that was a product of Enlightenment philosophy. As a consequence, some members of the postcolonial intelligentsia before and immediately after independence felt the need to turn to the pre-colonial patrimony of their respective cultures in an attempt to revive and revalue what had survived the colonial period or simply to incorporate elements from their current culture in their writings. In Sub-Saharan Africa and the Caribbean, this tendency gave birth to Negritude, and Léopold Sédar Senghor sought to confirm that if Reason was European then Emotion was Black. While this far-fetched and reductive essentialism obviously unleashed much contention, it foregrounded the idea that European rationalism did not have to be the norm and that it did not necessarily fit the lifestyle and beliefs of innumerable populations steeped in different cultures. In other words, it suggested that local lore did not have to be spurned altogether for the sake of modernity.

In a way, magic realism was the recognition that non-Western cultures could not be approached with a strictly Western(ized) mindset. Alejo Carpentier, who first elaborates the notion of “lo real maravilloso”, was indeed looking for a specifically Latin American feature to express a reality which, he argued, was different from what the European Surrealists were expressing. According to Carpentier and other postcolonial interpretations of the mode, magic realism is associated with non-Western cultures because of the presence of exotic magic and myth in the magic realist work. The use of magic has thus been considered as a conscious gesture to resist and provide a local alternative to the Eurocentric categorization of the world. Despite magic, the trend is still entrenched in reality. The repeated more or less direct allusions to History and the

history of the margins consolidated the reputation of “postcolonial” identity for magic realism.

Stephen Slemon has contributed greatly to the association of magic realism and postcolonialism in the theoretical debates around the mode by presenting the relativism of magic realism as a tool to destabilize Western assumptions of fixity. In an article published in 1988 --“Magic Realism as a Postcolonial Discourse”-- he stresses the function of magic realism as the weapon of the “silenced, marginalized, dispossessed voices” in their battle against “inherited notions of imperial history” (15). It becomes, in Slemon’s view, a textual device to address social and political issues while departing from the Western modes of narration and literary tradition, thereby reasserting a sense of identity. Slemon aptly emphasizes Robert Kroetsch and Linda Kenyon’s view that “magic realism as a literary practice seems to be linked with the perception of ‘living in the margin’ encoding with it perhaps, a concept of resistance to the massive imperial center and its totalizing systems” (10). In this sense magic realism is not simply an attempt to explain the world in a different way but a conscious resistance to the hegemony of imperial thought and perspective of history.

The postcolonial reputation of the mode in a way consolidated here by Slemon can be traced back to the early literature on magic realism as a literary trend through the writings of Carpentier and Alexis for instance. Carpentier’s idea that the marvelous emanates from the land and the culture of the people is reiterated by Jacques Stephen Alexis in his essay “Of the Marvelous Realism of the Haitians”. This seminal article was published in

1956 in *Présence Africaine* and in different form Carpentier's article in many respects, it does however reassert the idea that magic realism is an attitude inherent to the culture of people living in certain places: "[t]he Haitian people like other peoples of *Negro origin*, for example, has [*sic*] a very personal vision of the reality that can be *felt*, of the movement and rhythm of life [*italics mine*]" (266). He goes on to say that "the dryly and pretendedly [*sic*] realistic works miss their mark and do not touch certain peoples" (267). He claims that this difference does not imply a hierarchical classification between the peoples and nations of the world, but simply insists that Western rationalism does not correspond to a Haitian view of the world. Instead, he argues, the Haitian "naturally transposes his conception of relativity and of the marvelous into his vision of everyday reality" (269). In this article as well as Carpentier's, magic realism is not traced back to the influence of Franz Kafka, for instance, or Günter Grass as many critics and writers do. The magic is seen as a cultural feature specific respectively to the Latin American and Caribbean settings.

In *Mimesis, Genre, and Postcolonial Discourse: Deconstructing Magic Realism*, Jean-Pierre Durix deconstructs assumptions related to the above interpretations of the mode. Without denying the drive behind magic realism to assert the viability of other cultures besides the Western one, Durix contends that what is proposed in an article like Carpentier's is not a deconstruction of the Eurocentric categorization of the world, only a reversal (110) if not a confirmation of it, hence the disturbing nature of such essentialist definitions of magic realism. Besides denouncing this essentialism, Durix also deconstructs the supposition that magic realism is a genuine "return to native lore and

folk magic” (115) given that the authors contributing to the Latin American “Boom” almost invariably came from the upper and Westernized layers of their societies and often had limited knowledge of the indigenous myths and rituals that they exploited in their writings. To move away from these assumptions, Durix tries to place the term and the evolution of the trend within a larger context and thus notes the “affinities with the old carnivalesque tradition” à la Rabelais. Without denying the existence of these influences acknowledged by some writers, I want to contend with Durix’ claim that “[m]agic realism could probably not have existed without the influence of Rabelais, Sterne and Diderot” (129). True enough, Carpentier and Miguel Ángel Asturias –another exponent of the mode- did live in Paris when the influence of the Surrealist school was at its apogee. It is also true that similarities with some magic realist works can be identified in Rabelais and most directly in Günter Grass, by way of illustration. Still, in saying that the trend would not have emerged had it not been for those influences, Durix denies the cultural, not necessarily essentialist, factors that have contributed to the evolution of magic realism in a postcolonial, non-Western context such as India.

In the pre- and post-independence years, (ex)colonies were trying to cope with the question of identity vis-à-vis modernity and Westernization and whether there was an alternative to it. As Fawzia Afzal-Khan says, the decision to adopt realism and the idea of progress associated with rationalism is always accompanied with doubts as to its effectiveness in a postcolonial context. Indeed, “[h]ow appropriate or desirable is Western-style progress in non-Western societies?” (26). The outcome has often been an

attempt to bring together elements thought to be representative of both cultures. Magic realism in this sense seems to be propitious for this kind of hybridity or diversity.

Magic realism becomes one of the strategies through which traditional lore can be included within the otherwise modern setting of the work. Michael Gorra underlines the presence of this cultural aspect in Rushdie's works:

Rushdie has often noted his interest in the eclectic form within which India's traditional storytellers work, his fascination with the fact that it is 'not at all linear...the story does not go from the beginning to the end...but in great loops and circles back on itself, repeats earlier things, digresses'. (Gorra, 129)

While recognizing Western influences, Rushdie thus acknowledges identifiably "Indian" sources of inspiration. These digressions to which storytellers resort in order to arouse the attention of the audience, are also used for the same purpose in Rushdie's narratives according to Gorra. This multi-layering of stories that Gorra notes is also one of the main characteristics of magic realism. Indeed, the coexistence of magic and the real is a constant reminder of the relativity of the main narrative or official version of a story. The parallel stories sometimes undermine or provide a different perspective of the central narrative. The digressions common to traditional storytellers are here recuperated as a tool to reassert the magic realist approach to the world. Translated into the written world of the novel, however, they now play a more complex role mostly at the structural and metaphorical levels. Structurally, they contribute to the intricate nature of the narrative,

which becomes in itself a feature of magic realism. Metaphorically, digressions also provide a space for different voices to invade the story now and again thereby rendering dubious if not impossible the monopoly of any one voice, any one narrative, while continuously destabilizing the assumptions of the reader. In the wider global context, this also becomes a metaphor for the space that some postcolonial writers are making for their non-canonical style of writing.

Despite the cultural diversity expressed in magic realist works, many critics see magic realism as the outcome of a single tradition deriving directly from European Surrealism and the Fantastic. The inherent hybridity however points to the misconception of seeing magic realism as the outcome of a single tradition. The debate around the origin of the mode springs mostly from the problematic nature of magic realism as an appellation and a trend. The definitions given to it are often either too vague or too restrictive especially that there are many strategies through which apparently irrational events can be introduced and magic realism is just one such strategy. For example, instances of the Fantastic in European literature abound. It is beyond the scope of this thesis to compare and contrast the Fantastic and magic realism, but, very briefly, one can say that the major difference is that, in the fantastic, the writer is openly breaking the rules of “the real” by setting the narrative in a magical world and the reader responds accordingly with suspension of belief. In magic realism the trick is that it is not the rules of “the real” that are violated but the very conception of the real as a totally rational world. In the Western instances of magic realism, the magic seems to come as a rupture with the local tradition of realism and rationalism. In the postcolonial world it comes more like a continuity

with, or revival of, local tradition or culture as well as a dissonant voice in the world of a mainstream Western conception of the world. Here again I want to insist that this is in no way an attempt to render an essentialist description of the trend. It is simply important to acknowledge the differences in the way magic realism is used by the different writers.

Before considering the role of magic realism in the work of the three novelists in the light of a postcolonial perspective, it is, thus, important to recognize that its use is far from being limited to the role emphasized by the early criticism of Slemon (basically resistance to a hegemonic imperialistic center by the (ex)colonized margin). If Slemon aptly sees the implications with regards to postcolonial themes, others insist that this is only one side of the overall picture. For example, Jeanne Delbaere-Garant in "Pshycic Realism, Mythic Realism, Grotesque Realism: Variations on Magic Realism on Contemporary Literature in English" insists that it is not exclusively a postcolonial phenomenon (249). She returns to earlier examples of magic realism in Western European fiction and sees them as alternatives to "Bourgeois realism", springing from the "the war between reason and the irrational that has dominated European thought since Enlightenment" (251). In saying that magic realism is not necessarily postcolonial, there is an emphasis on the diversity within the trend itself, hence the categories that she establishes: "psychic realism" being "magic realism generated from inside the psyche" (251) and "mythic realism, being magic emanating from the environment" (252). Showing that magic realism may and does exist outside a postcolonial thematic frame sheds light not only on its uses in Western literature but also on the other ways it may function in non-Western literature.

The mode has also been viewed in the light of postmodernism, as in Wendy B. Faris' "Sheherazade's Children: Magic realism and Postmodern Fiction". Without denying the postcolonial aspect, she reacts against the tendency to limit the whole trend to this particular issue. Like Delbaere-Garant, she points to the presence of more than one kind of magic realism, citing Roberto González Echevarría's differentiation between the "epistemological" and the "ontological" types. In the former, "the marvels stem from an observer's vision", whereas in the latter "America is considered to be itself marvelous" (165). In a way, these two categories correspond to what Delbaere-Garant calls "psychic realism" and "mythic realism". The epistemological or psychic kind here seem to be more associated with the Western European version, whereas the ontological, mythic type has more to do with the very nature of the land and the culture. Many critics integrate European examples of magic realism in literature or trace the trend in vogue in the Latin American "Boom" back to early examples from Europe. Yet writers such as Alejo Carpentier or Gabriel García Márquez were interpreted with reference to Carpentier's definition of "lo real maravilloso Americano" according to which the mode is intrinsically attached to the land. By contrast, when evoking Kafka as a European counterpart, the magic is, of course, hardly attributed to the land or the culture. In this instance it becomes the fruit of the artist's individual and original (if not marginal) mind. Faris goes further, stating that in the epistemological kind of magic realism, there is less magic as instances of the marvelous are only sporadically deployed, while in the ontological version magic realism is thematically and even structurally pervasive in the text (165).

Timothy D'haen also affiliates magic realism with postmodernism but in a quite different way. The argument that he develops in his article "Magic realism and Postmodernism: Decentering Privileged Centers" is that magic realism does not simply have affinities with postmodernism, it is actually an offshoot of it, even though it is not called so in relation to non-Western literature:

It would seem, then, as if in international critical parlance a consensus is emerging in which a hierarchical relation is established between postmodernism and magic realism, whereby the latter comes to denote a particular strain of the contemporary movement covered by the former. (194)

For D'haen not only is magic realism part of postmodernism, it actually provides it with the resistance, the ethical and material concern that the trend often lacks in Western artistic creations. He suggests that the magic realist is simply the "ex-centric" postmodern and "merely to talk of magic realism in relation to postmodernism is to contribute to decentering that privileged discourse". This is the space where the "Other" is not the (ex)colonized but the Westerner. In other words, the hierarchy and the reluctance to call a work by a non-Westerner postmodern in a way confirm the agenda of resistance attributed to magic realism.

Despite the differences in the definitions, most critics seem to agree that various illustrations of the mode exist and that there is no clear line separating magic realism from other manifestations of fantasy. Likewise, affinities between magic realism and

postmodernism such as the concern with the relativity of truth and history, or the multiplicity of space has led some critics to conclude that the evolution of magic realism is tightly connected to that of postmodern theory. As I stated earlier, however, the failure to establish the history of magic realism clearly, not as a term but as a trend, points to its complex origin. It is in this sense that I propose Narayan as a magic realist writer. Indeed, as early as the forties, long before the Latin American boom reached its peak, he had already worked features of magic realism in *The English Teacher* published in 1945. It goes without saying that later writers and critics mutually inspired and influenced each other so that the mode itself went through a number of changes and redefinitions. We can nevertheless see in some works by Narayan an early version of magic realism marked by the characteristic use of myth in a modern context and the critical rather than fabulist tone that is derived from it.

Magic realism and postcolonialism: effective tool or token resistance

Despite the criticism that is usually conveyed through magic realism, some critics draw attention to the problem that the linking of magic realism and postcolonialism poses, namely escapism. Given that magic realism often implies the invocation of a mythical world, it has been critiqued as allowing postcolonial writers to eschew the concrete, pending concerns of their respective countries through extensive references to mythical and magical events, for example.

A categorical return to myth would admittedly be problematic. In *Cultural Imperialism and the Indo-English Novel: Genre and Ideology in R.K. Narayan, Anita Desai, Kamala*

Markandaya, and Salman Rushdie, Fawzia Afzal-Khan studies the presence of myth in opposition and in relation to realism in the works of four contemporary Indian writers and the ideological implications in the choice of either or both. In the introduction, she underlines the role of myth as an “ideological tool during the crisis created by colonialism and the political and social turmoil that ensued...In this sense, the mythic impulse is certainly regressive and anti-rationalist” (23-4).

“Mythic” writing about some “golden age” did prove important for setting historical records straight and revaluing local culture preexisting colonialism. But if postcolonial writers are to refer to a more recent reality in their fictions so as to criticize their societies constructively, the tableau of people living in harmony with nature in bygone times may be of little help. Myth often ends up expressing pride in a past grandeur and nostalgia for a time when that culture was both unchallenged and pure. Despite the potential for resistance that myth represents, it is ideologically problematic given the return to a remote and static mythical time seemingly incompatible with “modernity” (this is indeed what is at stake in the (post)colonial world). The standstill that such a position implies when carried to this extreme neither provides a solution for present problems nor faces them in a practical way. The aloofness and a-historical aspect of myth are thus ideologically problematic as Afzal-Khan argues in the introduction. One of the characteristics of magic realist writings however, is that the narrative is usually entrenched in contemporary reality. Thus grafting magic to the realist dimension that is part of magic realism transforms it into an effective tool to approach reality from a critical perspective.

In the introduction to *Cultural Imperialism*, Fawzia Afzal-Khan establishes a parallel between Lukács' opposition between realism and modernism and her own comparison between realism and myth in postcolonial novel writing. She compares the two kinds of writing from an ideological point of view. Georg Lukács wrote extensively on the ideological implications of novel writing. In *Realism in Our Time*, he opposes realism and modernism as literary genres from an ideological point of view. As he shows, "Man" even in literary representation cannot be stripped of his historical and social surrounding. In other words, portraying "Man" as an a-historical entity is a mere illusion. Modernists insist on dealing with *la condition humaine* and the notion of angst in relation to existence derived from the Heideggerian concept of "thrownness-into-being", regardless of the historical, social, political context in which the character is evolving. In Modernism, Lukács argues, "Man" is depicted in a static, helpless/hopeless situation. Realism, however, being deeply rooted in the social and historical environment of the characters, implies a stress on social(ist) change. Following the above comparison, Afzal-Khan analyzes the ideological implications of realism and what she calls mythical writing. The realistic novel being entrenched in a historical context here is associated with the idea of praxis, progress, whereas the choice of myth symbolizes the desire to recover a "lost Eden", to use Northrop Frye's term (cited in Afzal-Khan, 24). This return to a mythical past entails the risk of regression.

This approach to the use of myth in literature accounts for the reservation of some critics and writers vis-à-vis magic realism. Some believe that the world of myth and magic

associated with magic realism neutralizes any potential of resistance or criticism in the narrative. Of course the use of myth in magic realism is different from its use in traditional legends, nor is it the only way via which magic occurs in it. Yet the magic in magic realism is often subjected to the same charge of regression and distraction from the real pending problems in the postcolonial world. V.S. Naipaul, for instance, is quite an extreme example of the opponents of the trend which he describes as

a way currently in vogue of writing about degraded and corrupt countries...the way of fantasy and extravagance. It dodges all the issues. It is safe...empty, morally and intellectually; it makes writing ... an aspect of the corruption of the countries out of which it emerges. (cited in Gorra, 144)

Khan's analysis shows the limitations of the mythical approach given the risk to fall into a certain pattern where a remote past is celebrated and a problematic present and future simply eluded. However, in magic realism and with the mingling of magic and realism, the ideological implication of the magic realist narrative is not a promotion of a mythical past or a regression to a pre-colonial state of "purity". The point in resisting a strict use of realism even in addressing social, political, and historical issues is that it presents the reader as well as the writer with an alternative mode to express an alternative perception of "reality" which has always existed. It is the recognition that there may exist other visions and versions of reality and of truth. Structurally and stylistically speaking, the form in this sense takes on an ideological function.

Faris lists the characteristics that magic realism often shares with postmodernism, and one of the main similarities that she selects is the “antibureaucratic” stance of both (179). According to Faris, magic realist texts often “respond to a desire for narrative freedom from realism and from a univocal narrative stance; they implicitly correspond textually in a new way to a critique of totalitarian discourses of all kinds” (180). Escapism as an argument can be destabilized by the often contemporary contextualization of magic realist narratives. Judging any narrative that does not follow the rules of realism as escapist would be an instance of the hegemony of realism and rationalism whereby we would fail to see any ideological political implication in anything that does not enunciate its agenda in an exclusively realistic vein. Ideological involvement is not a characteristic of realist works only.

The argument of escapism is thus undermined by the reference to history through repetitive allusions and the restoration of unknown facts which are common place in magic realist narratives. Not only thematically, but even structurally, the hegemonic idea of official history is often attacked via the very notion of magic realism. In such texts there is an alternative reality running parallel to the one that we think we know. The existence of different levels of reality within the same narrative is a reminder of the existence of opposing notions of truth and history. Subjectivity, human memory and fantasy play havoc with the factuality and oneness of rationalism and linear history. Salman Rushdie, by way of illustration, often uses magic realism in this sense, to deconstruct the given order of things, including that of his own text. When the question of history is raised and deconstructed the way it is in various magic realist texts,

“escapism” is at the level of hegemony; in other words, it is hegemony that the writer and the narrative are attempting to escape rather than the reality of the land and characters peopling the novel.

Magic realism is a way to assert the presence and the belief in the possibility to manipulate the novel to make it a true dialogic space as Mikhail Bakhtin views it. For Bakhtin, the novel is “the site for what...he describes as a ‘dialogic’ encounter between different genres, systems of beliefs, types of language and indeed whole cultures” (cited in Gorra, 121). This is one of the ways the novel, a supposedly Western invention, is processed and (re)appropriated. This dialogic encounter also takes place at the level of the structure as well as the content. According to Bakhtin, the novel presents the reader with different levels of discourse within a language, none of which would be fully representative of the whole (cited in Gorra, 120). This concept of heteroglossia developed by Bakhtin can be applied to the magic realist novel since the different kinds of discourse do not simply intervene at the strict level of language but indeed at that of hegemonic “discourse”. Gorra says that Rushdie’s *Midnight’s Children*, for instance, “enacts its heteroglossia at the thematic level as well as a stylistic one” (121). The multiplicity of voices in the magic realist novel functions both literally and metaphorically.

Nevertheless, this agenda or the assumption that it is inherent in magic realism has been questioned and is not to be taken for granted as will be the focus of a section of my analysis of Rushdie’s work. Laura Moss, in “‘Forget those damnfool magic realists!’

Salman Rushdie's *Self-Parody as the Magic Realists' Last Sigh*", warns against the risk of the term becoming a "cheap cliché" (121). The over-generalizations to which the mode has often been subjected, she argues, contribute to the stereotyping of the literature associated with magic realism. After a short review of the major critics dealing with the trend such as Faris, Delbaere-Garant, D'haen, Moss expresses her reservation concerning these articles and such catchphrases as "the energy of the margins" (Delbaere-Garant), "postmodernism from the margins" (D'haen). She believes that they overlook the historical, political, and social specificity of different works. She reads Rushdie's *The Moor's Last Sigh* as a parody of his previous magic realist novel, *Midnight's Children*, foregrounding "the possibility that magic realism has become a fetishized form of resistance value" (129). In this novel, Moss sees a deflation of the "extraordinariness" that characterizes the first novel and its characters. Via this deflation of the magic present in *Midnight's Children*, Moss argues, the author is debunking the idea that "the form [is] politically imbricated" (131). *The Moor's Last Sigh* may express Rushdie's dubiousness as to the effectiveness of the genre but the main character in *Midnight's Children*, as well as many of the magic elements that people the text, are far from being steeped in grandeur. As I will show in Chapter III, Saleem is likelier to be described as an anti-hero than a hero in the traditional sense: he runs away from the battlefield, is disempowered, impotent, even when he still has his magical gift before being totally defeated by the Widow, he is overpowered by Shiva and has no control over the *Midnight's Children* Congress.

Another question related to this issue is not so much whether historical and political consciousness does take part in a magic realist work but the way the historical element is presented. Michael Gorra is disconcerted by the way horrid events in the history of India and Bangladesh are narrated in *Midnight's Children*:

both the fantasy and the extravagance of *Midnight's Children* can numb its readers to anything but its own saffron-and-green exhilaration. However entrancing --precisely because it is entrancing-- Rushdie's style distances one from the horrors it describes, making his description of them not only bearable but even enjoyable; it keeps one from being disturbed by the things that happen to his characters, even by Saleem's treatment at the hands of the Widow". (Gorra, 145)

According to Moss, Rushdie came to realize this weakness and wrote *The Moor's Last Sigh* in such a way as to question the effectiveness of magic realism in denouncing certain historical events. With reference to Rushdie's *Midnight's Children*, *Shame*, and *The Moor's Last Sigh*, I will argue that it is through magic realism that the social and political criticisms operate so that the charge of escapism as a consequence of magic realism is subverted in the three novels.

Despite the problematic nature of the term, what stands out is also the richness that the apparent oxymoron entails. Even though some have defined it in essentialist terms, magic realism is very different from the essentialist discourses such as Negritude or Afrocentrism. Hybridity takes its full meaning here, given that the trend does not reject

realism or rationalism as some believe, but resists their monopoly or even their primacy. It is in this sense that magic realism becomes a multicultural (though not trans-cultural) rather than an essentialist form. In the concluding chapter of his book, Durix defines magic realism as the hybrid genre *par excellence*, a site for what Bakhtin would call cultural dialogism.

According to Durix, local popular cultures were largely foregrounded in the postcolonial literature so as to establish a newly defined cultural space along multicultural lines (152). It becomes indeed impossible to categorize novels systematically as belonging exclusively to one culture given the hybridization that has taken place at the level of the ex-colonies (and ex-colonizers as well for that matter). The postcolonial writers writing after independence were not “reclaim[ing] their past...But at least, they sought to repossess it in imaginative terms, to rearticulate the trauma of conquest and deprivation so that at least that part of their collective memory be not confiscated entirely” (156). The idea here is that without necessarily promoting the return to a retrograde lifestyle, one can still claim one’s history and appeal to the collective memory. In other words, magic realism appeals not only to the collective memory related to mythological lore but also and mainly to a common past and present of colonialism, transculturation, and eventual hybridity.

The postcolonial dimension of magic realism and the risk of exoticism

In addition to the issue of escapism, authors writing within the magic realist mode have also been accused of yielding to exoticism. The question of exoticization goes hand in

hand with that of essentialism. In reviewing some of the early definitions of magic realism, Jean-Pierre Durix analyzes definitions such as Alejo Carpentier's or Miguel Ángel Asturias, and points to the essentialism involved in some of them. In his definition of "lo real maravilloso Americano", Alejo Carpentier indeed criticizes Surrealism for what he sees as its artificial interest in magic, the major difference between this genre and magic realism being that the latter writers do not make up "the marvelous" but simply express the reality of the land that has always existed and has always been deemed real (86). The major difference, Carpentier emphasizes, is at the level of *belief in the marvelous* which does not exist in Surrealism, where the interest in voodoo or surrealism does not spring from a genuine belief in them but is an attempt to create an artistic alternative to the strictness of Realism in Art. This kind of essentialism claims that the Latin American reality can *only* be expressed through the integration of the world of myth and magic and attempts to fix the culture and land in this image exclusively.

Despite the excesses in the use of and theorization about the mode, magic realism is not another illustration of the myth of the Noble Savage. However, it is undeniable that with the commercial success of the mode (starting with the so-called "boom"), it was easy to fall into the trap and "produce" the novels that the readership and publishers expected. Any attempt to promote a particularly postcolonial thinking has often been subject to this attack: responding to the expectation of Western readership with the fabrication of exotic images on demand.

As Graham Huggan shows extensively in *The Postcolonial Exotic*, in this era the line between postcolonialism and postcoloniality is very difficult if possible at all to draw. Huggan uses the term postcolonialism to refer to “an anti-colonial intellectualism that reads and valorizes the signs of social struggle in the faultlines of literary and cultural texts” (6). By postcoloniality, he means the marketing of the above. He defines it as follows:

The regime of values [of postcoloniality] pertains to a system of symbolic, as well as material exchange in which even the language of resistance may be manipulated and consumed...[it] is a value-regulating mechanism within the global late-capitalist system of commodity exchange. (6)

The association of the magic realist trend with the field of postcolonialism definitely exposes the trend when practiced by “postcolonialist” writers to its recuperation for a uniquely commercial exoticizing purpose. Considering the exotic connotation of the word “magic”, the exotic appeal and exploitation are almost inevitable. This issue is far from being simple, though. As stated earlier, the very idea of a mixture within the genre works against essentialism, yet this does not immunize the work against exoticism. In the light of the above differentiation between postcolonialism and postcoloniality, the resistance present and implied by the use of magic realism can be neutralized. It, indeed, becomes a token whereby certain writers simply attempt to satisfy the expectation for a certain amount of exoticism so that their novels fit in the norm of the so-called New Literatures and respond to the demand of the market.

Nonetheless, Huggan's point is not that any postcolonial work recuperated by the machine of postcoloniality is necessarily following the recipe of success and thus relinquishing its potential for resistance. Rather, the two systems are entangled, and the message of the former can hardly spread without the assistance of the latter. Here the idea of "strategic exoticism" takes its full meaning. It is "the means by which postcolonial writers/thinkers, working from within exoticist codes of representation, either manage to subvert those codes...or succeed in redeploying them for the purposes of uncovering differential relations of power" (32) as does, for example, Arundhati Roy through allusions to Joseph Conrad's Kurtz in her novel *The God of Small Things*. Nevertheless, this strategy does not solve the problem and questions persist: to what extent are such allusions to be interpreted as strategic exoticism, or to put it differently to what extent does exoticism, be it strategic, serve the interests of the postcolonial world. Such questions are inevitable given the reactions that such writings trigger in the writers' countries of origin on the one hand, and the hasty conclusions that a Western audience might draw from their narratives on the other.

I will apply Huggan's notion of "strategic exoticism" to Arundhati Roy's approach to magic realism and the potentially exotic passages in her novel -such as the one where she refers to *Heart of Darkness*. My argument in Chapter IV is that Roy's different way to introduce magic realism does not represent a break with the trend as many critics have suggested. Rather, the mode continues to function within the narrative and emphasize the narrator's criticism of the society without reproducing earlier models of magic realism as

used by Rushdie for instance. After arguing that *The God of Small Things* displays instances of magic realism, I will proceed to show how Roy's use of the mode differs from other authors in the sense that she plays with the exoticist potential of the mode.

Magic realism : a recent phenomenon? Reading R. K. Narayan as a magic realist writer

R. K. Narayan started writing in the thirties when the Victorian model for novel writing was still prominent. When compared to Rushdie, R. K. Narayan is seen as belonging to an earlier generation. This categorization accounts for the fact that critics rarely refer to his work as magic realist. Indeed, in Indian fiction in English, magic realism is perceived as having been introduced mainly by Rushdie. Even though one of Narayan's novels --*A Tiger for Malgudi*-- was written at the same time as Rushdie's *Shame*, Narayan is rarely read with reference to magic realism. Similarly, the advent of magic realism in criticism is often conflated with the birth of the mode itself. The purpose of this chapter is to show that magic realism preexisted the Rushdie generation and to illustrate how some of Narayan's works display features of this trend. The main magic realist characteristic in his work is that he integrates myth with reality in a contemporary context; by so doing he distinguishes his writing from the fabulist genre. The other magic realist characteristic in these two novels is that the idea of a parallel reality is not merely used to promote a vision of life centered on Hinduism, but also to provide a certain questioning if not criticism of the society, including a certain perception of Hinduism itself. Ironically, some critics have mistaken false mysticism for magic realism in *The Guide*. In my discussion I will set up a contrast between this aspect in this novel and the magic realism that characterizes *The English Teacher* and *A Tiger for Malgudi*. In these two novels, I will further argue that magic realism also provides the critical dimension of the narratives.

The reluctance of many critics to include Narayan in their list of magic realist exponents can be traced back to the reception of Narayan as a realist writer. He has been regarded as writing in a realistic mode to give a faithful description of a fictive yet representative Indian town, Malgudi. As Chelva Kanaganayakam comments, “the average Indo-Anglian novel is...shaped by the conventions of expressive realism since it developed in the shadow of Victorian fiction” (17-8), and Indian novelists of the generation of R. K. Narayan --including Narayan himself-- were often interpreted in those terms. Narayan was thus presented to the Western audience as yet another “chronicler of the referential” (30). On the other hand, his extensive use of Hindu mythology has not gone unnoticed. This aspect of his work was sometimes interpreted as part of the realism that guides his writing; after all how can Hinduism be overlooked if one is to render a realistic account of India? However, as I will argue in this chapter, the invocation of Hindu mythology is not simply out of concern for realism. It is, indeed, clear that myth in this case does not solely function as a mere theme but is integrated as part of the vision of life presented in the fiction. I read the way myth is integrated as magic realism rather than fabulist style. Indeed, here the magic, or the extraordinary (by rational standards), is entrenched in a contemporary context (however subjective representation can be), and is used as a strategy to present a parallel to the rational world while using this approach as a means for criticism.

Given the reception of the author described above, he has been criticized for presenting a hegemonic, homogenized image of India, while promoting Hindu, middle-class based principles and perspectives. Harveen Mann and Anita Desai are two of the critics who

attack the supposed realism and representative nature of the author's oeuvre. The former rejects the claim that his novels are "apolitical, universalist-humanist, and yet representatively 'Indian' in their spirituality" and denounces his "masculinist, brahminic world view" (61). Anita Desai declares that "there are many of Narayan's readers who feel that his fiction does not reflect the chaos, the drift, the angst that characterizes a society in transition and that his 'rootedness' is a relic of another, pastoral era now shaken and threatened beyond recovery" (cited in Mann, 63). Desai draws attention to the ideologically problematic integration of myth and the ensuing aloofness from the problems of a changing society. Her view is representative of the way Narayan's work has been read as claiming to represent a reality through the promotion of a static, mythical image that overlooks the dynamic reality of India. A careful examination of the novels, however, reveals that the charge that Narayan presents an unmitigated promotion of a Hindu perception of reality can easily be destabilized.

The Indian novel in English developed largely around the model of the British Victorian novel according to the criteria of Western realism; however, Chelva Kanaganayakam, author of *Counterrealism and Indo-Anglian Fiction*, argues that there has always existed a strand of counterrealism with which he affiliates Narayan's writing. He recognizes the tendency of previous critics and readers to take the realism of Narayan for granted. He, by contrast, points to what he calls artifice in this author but chooses to call it counterrealism in order to distinguish his style from magic realism. I will argue, however, that what he calls counterrealism is in fact a form of magic realism.

Kanaganayakam sets two categories through which Indian literature in English can be approached, namely “realism” and “experiment”. He argues that

[r]ealism implies transparency; it claims implicitly that the world of fiction reflects the real world outside (despite the obvious problems of that assertion). Experiment acknowledges its artifice and its hybridity and works on the assumption that there is a hiatus between the real world and the fictive universe.

(15)

In his view, “[f]or Narayan the strategy [of counterrealism] serves the purpose of resistance, of turning away from contemporary realities to a world he is comfortable with” (32). The peculiarity in Narayan’s fiction, though, is that “the construction of Malgudi [in the novels] flaunts itself as metonymic while operating within the discourse of the experimental” (35). Kanaganayakam identifies a juxtaposition of “Western realism” and an “indigenous world view” that results in the creation of a “parallel world - an alternative one- that pretends to be the real one” (32). Yet he would not call it magic realism. His perception of magic realism is that it is Western and Western-inspired though used in postcolonial writing. The reason he would call Narayan counterrealist rather than magic realist is that artifice in his novels, he argues, comes from traditional Indian writing where non-realism is a common feature. In magic realist writers, he insists, the influence (or part of it at least) is clearly Western or Latin American. Kanaganayakam’s above classification of Indian writers leads him to affiliate both Narayan and Rushdie within the category of experiment. However, his insistence on calling Narayan’s style counterrealism and not magic realism is representative of the

tendency to view magic realism as a full-fledged genre whose emergence and development are largely contiguous with the rise of postmodern and postcolonial theorizing. He sees the origin of Narayan's counterrealism in the traditional forms of Indian storytelling, whereas magic realism, in his view, emanates largely from Western forms of writing and theories.

A closer look at Kanaganayakam's argument, however, reveals that the distinction does not really hold. Both categories -counterrealism and magic realism- equally share the characteristic of hybridity by borrowing from different local and Western traditions. Referring to magic realist writers, he argues that the attempt to present an exclusive non-Western view of the world is forestalled by the nature of magic realism as a hybrid genre in itself. However, he also admits that even "counterrealism in Indo-Anglian literature looks both ways [for Indian and Western inspiration] and locates itself on the crossroads of cultural intersection" (25). For him, if the language and the genre (novel writing) seem to be Western, counterrealism constitutes the text's Indian feature. I want to argue that counterrealism (as defined here by the critic) is no less a hybrid form than magic realism. If the former is inspired by traditional Indian writings and storytelling, then this testifies to the complex "origin" (if traceable) of magic realism. It would be a misconception to establish a specific date for the emergence of a well-determined genre called magic realism. It is clear that the seeds of it are to be found long before its advent as a trend in the theoretical field. Narayan's work does mobilize certain features of what was later to be called magic realism. Kanaganayakam himself shares the view that artifice in Indian fiction in English is not exactly a recent phenomenon,

There is no attempt to imply that counterrealism began with R. K. Narayan. On the contrary, a form of fantasy was very much in vogue among the pioneers...Nonetheless, in the last five decades, counterrealism as a self-conscious mode began to be employed by a number of Indo-Anglian authors.

(26)

Here, while trying to differentiate between counterrealism and magic realism, he actually establishes a continuity between both by acknowledging that both have hybrid origins and that the emergence of magic or counterrealism (or, one could add, the distinction between the two) cannot be clearly established.

It is clear that the magic realist aspect in Narayan's novels is tightly linked to Hindu mythology and mysticism. The way magic events are integrated in a contemporary context and mythology is not presented as a fixed, static, and closed world distinguishes this magic realist work from traditional legends. I am not suggesting that whenever mysticism is evoked, it is to be interpreted as magic realist. Indeed, some of the opponents of the trend aptly point out that the expression "magic realism" was too easily applied to postcolonial writings that did not always display magic realist features. It would, thus, be useful to contrast different works by the same author so as to differentiate between the mere depiction of a mystical atmosphere as is the case in *The Guide*, and what I identify as magic realist in *The English Teacher* and *A Tiger for Malgudi*.

The Guide (1958) is interesting in that it presents a certain duality through the creation of a mystic atmosphere alongside a realistic one. Here the mystic mood --even though it is fake-- pervades the first and last pages of the novel. The story unfolds along two time scales, one describing the life of the protagonist, Raju, who spends his childhood around the railway station in Malgudi and becomes a tourist guide. After meeting Rosie, who leaves her husband for him, he becomes the agent in charge of her dancing career. An attempt to forge her signature to take possession of her jewelry sends him to jail and makes him lose his fortune. After his liberation, he finds refuge in a cave where the village people take him for a mystic. Raju, baffled by their credulity, eventually adopts the role of a *sadhu*. When a lingering drought threatens the village, a misunderstanding leads the people to believe that Raju has decided to fast to summon the rain. Though he does not believe in the ritual that he partly invented, Raju feels trapped and performs the sacrifice. The novel does not follow this chronological order, and chapters narrating the two different lives of Raju are alternated, so that the first and last pages are marked by the life of the hermit that Raju becomes.

The novel does not display any instances of magic realism. Like most novels by Narayan, however, the reality of a modern town is intermingled or contrasted with the existence of another approach to life here represented by the retreat of the *sanyasi*. In *The Guide*, this duality is not expressed through magic realism. Yet the mere presence of the mystic mood again has been interpreted as a form of magic realism. Imtiaz Habib, for instance, in the article "Interrogating Cultures: Hybrid Subjectivity as Third Space in R.K. Narayan's *The Guide*, V.S. Naipaul's *A House for Mr. Biswas*, and Salman

Rushdie's *Midnight's Children*", is one such critic who takes a certain degree of mysticism or spirituality for magic realism.

Habib analyzes *The Guide*, *A House for Mr Biswas*, and *Midnight's Children* magic realistically. But *The Guide* is a good example of what magic realism is not. The closest we get to the idea of magic is when the desperate people of the village really believe that Raju can work a miracle. All the elements of "magic" seem so only to a believing audience that sees a *swami* in a man whose only merit is to know how to impress them. Imtiaz Habib draws on the idea of hybridity in the analysis of the three novels. The three respective protagonists tackled in the essay stand in a third space that is neither totally Western nor exclusively Indian and which takes from both at the same time. As stated earlier, magic realism is closely linked to the idea of hybridity, given the openness of the mode to different traditions. For Habib, hybridity (here the coexistence of a traditional world and a modern one) is achieved through magic realism in *The Guide*. Habib compares Raju to the protagonist of *Midnight's Children* seeing magic realism in "Saleem's omen-ridden and intriguey [*sic*] beginnings and extraordinarily perceptive nose" as comparable to "Raju's amazing ability to sense what is expected of him and accordingly to re-fashion himself at will" (34).

In this particular novel, however, the coexistence of two worlds, one ruled by the demands of modern life and the other marked by a certain timelessness, is not achieved through magic realism. In *The Guide*, Raju first goes to the cave because, as he says, he has just left prison and has nowhere else to go. Moving away from the town, he ends up

in a kind of timeless world and lifestyle that could have taken place anywhere. Here the timeless and the immediate are structurally brought together. Before meeting Rosie, Raju finds his customers at the railway station which is, as Habib aptly points out, an archetypal symbol of progress and modernism (47). During his life as a hermit, Raju loses count of the passing years. In this apparently a-historical context, he learns to give the people the guidance they need so that his life is now routinely organized around the counseling, curing etc. of the villagers and telling them stories inspired from Hindu mythology. The belief that Raju has supernatural powers is shared by the village people only and is not supported by the text. While *Midnight's Children* is structured around magic realist events (Saleem's power, Parvati's trick that makes him disappear in Bangladesh and reappear in India etc.), *The Guide* does not display any such events. Raju's shrewdness, however impressive, does not make of him a magic realist character comparable to Saleem Sinai. Raju is first intrigued and even irritated by the status of sainthood that Velan and all the villagers confer upon him. He then indulges in the game of saying "grand things" to a believing audience. When Velan tells him about his hitherto recalcitrant sister finally agreeing to carry out the family's wedding plan for her, Raju impresses the man by guessing an obvious story: when Velan tells him that he wants to celebrate the wedding as fast as possible, Raju asks "[f]or fear that she may change her mind once again?"...He knew why Velan was rushing it through at this pace. It was easy to guess why. But the remark threw the other into a fit of admiration" (127). His guessing here does not have anything to do with magic or clairvoyance, but the village people crave guidance and this man who has experienced more than they have has the capacity to create an aura around himself that they are only too avid to take for sainthood.

Throughout his life in the cave, Raju is aware of his imposture. His life as a hermit preaching a certain lifestyle through legends from Hindu mythology does contribute to the change in his personality but however helpful he eventually becomes to the people, his supposed “sainthood” and powers are no less a pretense by the end. Surrounded by credulous people who cater to his needs, praise him and expect him to guide them out of their problems, Raju begins to appreciate his role. The status of “Sainthood” is indeed welcome to a man who has lost everything: his mother, his father’s house, his lover, his status and fortune. In the modern town of Malgudi and by modern standards, he has become nobody. What keeps him from leaving the cave and going back to town is the fear of the humiliation with which people might greet him and the prospect of a destitute life. Where he is, food comes “unasked for”. As a result of a tragi-comic misunderstanding, Raju learns that the village people expect him to fast and accomplish a ritual that he told them provokes the coming of the rains. At this point Raju realizes that his trick has taken an unexpected turn. At first he is struck with the absurdity of the situation as “[h]e now saw the enormity of his own creation. He had created a giant with his puny self, a throne of authority with that slab of stone” (96). Yet Raju is bound to undergo an important change that leads Habib to see

[t]he strongest instance [of magic realism in] Raju’s miraculous growth into successful sadhu-ship. As Raju’s life is magically rewritten from that of a confident trickster to that of a mythic saintly hero who sacrifices his life to save a

dying village, what is also revisioned is the possibility of release from the oppressive fixities of history. (36)

The change, according to Habib, is a magical transformation of the beliefs of the village people into reality. The readers have to reconsider the position of Raju who, Habib argues, is no longer the opportunist trickster but an authentic *sadhu*. Although he eats secretly at the beginning, Raju does not leave. He has been touched by the people's solicitude and does not really want to abandon them, thus shattering their hope. Here the notion of *Karma* seems to be at work. He considers fleeing but renounces the idea for he cannot leave unnoticed; he, in vain, tries telling the people that he is not the savior they think and that "no power on earth can save you if you are doomed" (211). Ironically, this is what happens to him. He dooms himself the day he partly invents the story of saints fasting to provoke rain (95-6). He does not really work against the situation in which he is forced and eventually fasts until he collapses. His complete loss of control over his life, the fast, and the people's utter confidence in him bring about the change in him. He, indeed, starts thinking

"If by avoiding food I should help the trees bloom, and the grass grow, why not do it thoroughly". For the first time in his life, he was making an earnest effort, for the first time he was learning the thrill of full application, outside money and love; for the first time he was doing a thing in which he was not personally interested. (213)

Indeed, Raju does relinquish his own comfort, and then his life for the sake of the village people. He yields to the fast more out of challenge for himself to struggle to try and meet their expectations than out of his genuine belief that his sacrifice will bring rain. In short, the egoism and egotism that characterize him before his arrest give way to the willingness to comply with a ritual that he has actually partly invented (95-6) so as not to shatter the people's hope. This change that seems impossible within his previous lifestyle becomes possible in a rural, almost timeless, world where he leads the simple life of a *sadhu*. What starts as an imposture ends in a sacrifice, and the people that he has considered ignorant enough to take him for a saint manage to move him to tears (95) so that he refrains from leaving them.

This ending has ideological implications as to the position of a man in modern India faced with two alternatives: the town with its railway station and its tourists, and the bare ancient temple with a *sanyasi* living by gifts and devoting his time to teaching, curing, and counseling. Imtiaz Habib affiliates this novel with a certain "discourse of postcolonial Indo-Anglian fiction [in which] spiritualism appears in its parodic magic realist form of quack mysticism" (35). The third space that the postcolonial novel creates, according to Habib, is a strategy that allows the novelist to borrow from two worlds while also questioning aspects of both. This is, indeed, the case in *The Guide* but here the coexistence of two worlds --mythical and modern-- is not achieved through magic realism. We do not witness a miracle by the end, only people desperately believing in one. In *The Guide* two styles (realism and mysticism) seem to cohabit in the space of the novel and engage in a dialogic relationship in the Bakhtinian sense even

though the mystical atmosphere rarely takes over, given that Raju never acquires the powers he is expected to have. In the other two novels, *The English Teacher* and *A Tiger for Malgudi*, however, the distinction between myth and mysticism on the one hand and reality on the other is blurred, a fact which places Narayan's work properly in the magic realist mode.

In *The English Teacher* (1945), the evocation of a spiritual world can be read as magic realist. I associate the mode displayed here with magic realism and not with a traditionalist mythical style because the narrative never shifts from a modern context to a timeless one. Furthermore, the magic experience in the novel gives the protagonist enough insight to criticize the system with which he has complied so far. Political and social criticism being an important component of magic realism, this feature makes the author's style akin to magic realism rather than a traditional fabulist style.

The particularity of this text is that magic realism is introduced in the second half of the narrative. During the first half of the story, nothing unpredictable in the sense of irrational happens in terms of style: Krishnan teaches English literature to college students and his life evolves along a perfectly realistic plot. The major change that happens in this part is when his family comes to join him, thus putting an end to his "bachelor" life in the residence of the school where he is a teacher. The rituals that his mother insists on performing upon their arrival at the new house are described in a realistic way. After his wife dies of tuberculosis, Krishnan's world crumbles and his daughter, Leela, becomes his sole interest. Nothing in his life alleviates the pain of his

bereavement until he receives a letter informing him that the spirit of his wife is trying to send him a message. The renewed communication with his wife orchestrates another change beyond the well-being he generally derives from it. He begins to see his life in a new light and is more and more uncomfortable with what he perceives as the futility of his teaching job in the British system of education. The spirit of Susila informs him that his daughter has been to a nearby school and that is how he meets the teacher and is introduced to another philosophy of education. Krishnan's new insight in the world of spirits leads him to search for a meaning for his actions. He eventually resigns from the college to teach at his daughter's school.

The novel thus displays a blending of the genres of realism (in the first half) and magic realism, yet, given the binary structure, the introduction of magic has been interpreted as a shift from realism to the world of myth. One such interpretation is elaborated by Afzal-Khan. For her, realism tends to be associated with Western values such as "rationalism, materialism, industrialism, technological innovation" (Afzal-Khan, 25) and the mythical mode with stasis and withdrawal from material and social life. She argues that Krishnan is one of those characters who "choose to retreat from the pressures of social life [associated with the characteristics of realism above] into a world of mysticism and myth. In other words, they choose against maturity and sincerity in the realist mode, although they may achieve sincerity and wisdom in the mode of myth" (29). The critic analyzes Krishnan's decision to relinquish his position at the college for that of teacher at his daughter's school as such a move. Even if in this change the teacher discards the individualistic drive of earning a hundred rupees a month, to Afzal-Khan this decision

represents a “rejection of the ‘adult’ world of realism and responsibility in favor of the child’s world of fantasy and romance” (37). Despite the fact that each mode seems to occupy a different space in *The English Teacher*, this binarism, however, would be too simple to describe what the protagonist is experiencing.

The protagonist’s magical experience is not equated with a withdrawal from social responsibility, but is accompanied by a novel socio-national interest and wish to be useful in addition to his need to have a “harmonious existence” (*The English Teacher*, 205). The character discovers another world: that of spirits and learns to communicate with his wife. The magic here does not transform the space of the narrative into a remote “pastoral” (Afzal-Khan, 37) and mythical realm. The strategy is comparable here to what has since been theorized as magic realist in the sense that the magic is entrenched in a contemporary context and that is accompanied with a newly acquired critical perspective from the teacher. In parallel with this experience, he starts to explore an alternative vision of education. Thinking about his resignation letter, he has the urge to attack

a whole century of false education. I was going to explain why I could no longer stuff Shakespeare and Elizabethan metre and Romantic poetry for the hundredth time into young minds and feed them on the dead mutton of literary analysis and theories and histories, while what they needed was lessons in the fullest use of the mind. This education had reduced us to a nation of morons; we were strangers to our own culture and camp followers of another culture, feeding on leavings and garbage. (205)

His renewed contact with Hindu principles of life through the communication with the spirit of Susila helps him start thinking of the *raison d'être* of teaching British literature the way he does in an Indian context. He now reconsiders the task in relation to a whole nation, people and history. This does not usher him into activism but it does arouse a certain cultural awareness and concern. Interestingly, the change that Krishnan experiences is not characterized by the detachment often implied by the mythical mode. The children's school does seem a happier place to be than the college, but it also represents an opportunity for him to start new experiments at the level of educational methods now that he is convinced of the futility of the British system as applied in India and has become impatient with the Western mind and its systematic need of "classifying, labeling, departmentalizing" (207). The fact that he now rejects the material comfort of the hundred rupees provided by his former work together with the prestige derived from it is symptomatic of a new stance towards the "real" world rather than a retreat from it. In other words, what happens at the end is a mixture of the genres rather than a radical transformation of one into another, hence the magic realism in *The English Teacher*. When he resigns, the teacher informs Brown, the dean of his college, that he does not intend to throw into oblivion the British poets and dramatists that he has taught for years: "I hope to give them to these children for their delight and enlightenment, but in different measure and in a different manner" (208). This is all but a withdrawal into a petrified, mythical past; rather, it is an attempt to adapt education (including Western elements) to Indian culture and needs instead of simply imitating an imported culture at the expense of one's own.

If R. K. Narayan's style does not seem to conform to the definition some later critics give to magic realism, the view of magic realism as a particular stance vis-à-vis reality rather than a well established genre is certainly relevant to his writings. Amaryll Chanady, in an article entitled "The Territorialization of the Imaginary: Latin American Self-Affirmation and Resistance to Metropolitan Paradigms", analyzes the early theorization of the genre by Latin American critics. Among them, Luis Leal, in "El realismo mágico en la literatura hispanoamericana" (1967), presents magic realism as an "attitude towards reality" rather than a full-fledged trend, the major characteristic being that the magic realist writer "does not need to justify the mysterious nature of events, as the writer of the fantastic has to" (cited in Chanady, 132). In *The English Teacher*, for instance, there is no attempt to justify the magic by introducing the reader to the esoteric world of spirits or Hinduism which allows the belief in such practices. Nor does the character linger on his bafflement at the letter from a man informing him of the message of his late wife. After his early doubts, the teacher soon takes to this new habit as his weekly visits almost become a routine for him as well as in the novel itself. As Delbaere-Garant comments, "[a]s is generally the case in magic realism we are not offered any explanation of events and the calm distancing of the narrative voice makes us forget the implausibility of the strange happenings" (Delbaere-Garant, 258). The link with Hinduism is established through the choice of the spirits to communicate with the two men in a temple even though the novelist does not explain it.

The magic realism at work here is thus more easily identified through the perception of the trend as an attitude towards reality than through the later definitions of the genre.

Indeed, those definitions were elaborated as the idea of blending the two modes was seized upon by postcolonial critics and associated with postmodernism. The writing investigated within this field often happens to be more explicitly politicized. Many writers have also been inspired by the form of magic realism used by Salman Rushdie, for instance. Consequently, in later literature, magic realism has been used in an openly “antibureaucratic” way, to use Faris’ expression (179), hence the reputation of activism attached to magic realist writers. Despite the differences, Narayan’s style reflects what Faris sees as a characteristic “desire for narrative freedom from realism and from a univocal narrative stance” (180). Narayan’s writing represents this need to express a particular identity that neither imitates the West nor regresses into a world completely aloof from a certain historical and social context. Faris adds that “[magic realist writings] implicitly correspond textually in a new way to a critique of totalitarian discourses of all kinds” (180). According to many interpretations of Narayan’s style of writing, it is this kind of critical stance that his “tranquil fiction lacks” (Desai cited in Mann, 63). A more overt critical political position in magic realist fiction in later writings indeed seems to have diverted attention from Narayan’s more subtly rendered criticism and involvement in the society that he depicts.

Narayan’s representation of Hinduism might be homogenizing but it is not exoticizing, and his novels never become anthropological, religious documentaries of India. The ideological implication of the introduction of this non-Western religious aspect in a non-mythical context in *The English Teacher* has been pointed out above and goes hand in hand with the spirit of magic realism. Hinduism pervades different aspects of the narrative and even the evolution of Krishnan’s personality but never leads him to

withdraw completely from modern society like Raju or the *sanyasi* in *A Tiger for Malgudi*.

The destabilization of “totalitarian discourses of all kinds” (Faris, 180) achieved through magic realism is even more obvious in *A Tiger for Malgudi* (1983). The story is narrated by an ageing tiger from his cage in a zoo. After an early happy life in the jungle, the tiger is captured and trained in a circus. He eventually reacts to the treatment to which he is subjected by killing his tamer and escaping. In the town, a terrified population decides to have him killed, but he is saved by the *sadhu* that will become his Master. The man, who values the soul of the tiger in spite of his frightening appearance, has the power to communicate with the animal that he names Raja. Years later, the *sadhu* feels that he needs to relinquish all ties to the world and takes Raja to a zoo where the tiger is to spend the last years of his life. In his cage, Raja reminisces fondly about his savior and the enlightening experience of living with him. The magic realist stance of the novel provides a sense of perspective as the tiger’s narrative is fraught with cracks that undermine his perspective and articulate the author’s doubts about some of the Hindu doctrines the novel seemingly upholds.

The critical distance that, according to some critics, the writer lacks in many of his writings becomes a more important component of this novel. *A Tiger for Malgudi* might first give the impression that it presents all the elements of a traditional and traditionalist fable structured around and promoting Hindu principles. Yet the tone proves decidedly ironic and critical more than is usually the case in such fables. In other words, the

fantastic is not evoked in conformity with the fabulist tradition; rather it is akin to magic realism. Here, magic realism is more pervasive than in other novels especially because of the inherent though not too obvious critical stance in the narrative. The two aspects (criticism and magic realism) are definitely linked given the relativism implied by the mode. Magic realism here becomes a sort of parody of the traditional fables, whereby the magic persists but is used not only to uphold the Hindu perspective but also to force a rethinking of certain notions associated with it.

More so than in *The English Teacher*, here magic realism is achieved in relation to Hindu philosophy. The *sadhu* does have magic powers and preaches that the most important thing in all creatures is their soul, regardless of the form they have in the present life. Thus the principles of Karma, reincarnation, and sainthood through elevation of the soul are constantly brought to the fore. Understandably, thus, this novel is often described as a fable that seems to promote a Hindu-oriented notion of life unquestioningly. Patrick Swinden among others insists on the importance of Hindu notions at work in the novels both at the level of content and structure. The idea of change at the level of characters

is unintelligible outside the parameters of Hindu thought that plays such an important role in Narayan's fiction; and...the play of that thought over the changes and continuities of his characters' behaviour is represented more strongly than exclusively Eurocentric interpretations of his practice as a novelist might have led Western commentators to believe. (66)

The Master keeps repeating that Raja only has the appearance of a tiger -which alludes to the process of reincarnation- while he has a soul and is capable of discoursing with his master. He also clearly informs him that he can only help his soul and that Raja still has to kill to alleviate his hunger however hateful this act becomes to him. The Master presents moral elevation and transcendence of physical and material bondage as the key to salvation. The *sadhu* is the only man who manages to tame Raja without the use of force and deterrents such as a whip or a chair the way Captain does in the circus. The master never fears the tiger and magically transcends the limitation of his body by disappearing and reappearing when Raja first tries to attack him. At the same time, the tiger magically realizes that he can understand the man's speech and communicate with him. What ensues is an important change, as Raja acquires a moral perception of the world around him and comes to experience guilt as a result of his shape and his need to kill to sustain his body. The novel ends with the reiteration of the principle of reincarnation, as the man bids farewell to the tiger: "both of us will shed our forms soon and perhaps we could meet again, who knows? So goodbye for the present" (176).

The reputation of Narayan as a writer promoting Hinduism sometimes masks a critical and ironic dimension in *A Tiger for Malgudi*. This is mostly true of Michel Pousse's interpretation of Narayan's fiction in *R.K. Narayan: A Painter of Modern India* where he reads *A Tiger for Malgudi* as a continuation of previous novels. He projects the writer's oeuvre on a continuum made up of the various stages in the "psychological development of Man" along a Hindu ideal. According to this analysis, the Master in *A Tiger for Malgudi*, "could well be a perfected Raju" (48). Pousse argues that Krishnan in *The*

English Teacher has reached a certain stage in his evolution but is still “too young...to start on the life of a hermit” (26). This last stage or “the final *asrama*” is thus described in the life led by the tiger’s Master in *A Tiger for Malgudi*. In the latter novel, thus, the author reaches “a philosophical peak” and therefore, the character of the Master represents, in Pousse’s view, the “Indian ideal of Man” (50). Before becoming a hermit, Pousse insists, “he fought alongside Gandhi, was a good citizen of Malgudi, a model clerk in an insurance company, and a perfect husband for twenty years” (48). Pousse concludes that the man “completed the first three *asramas* of life”.

Underlying and undermining the style of a Hindu fable, however, are instances where the author’s critical stance is made obvious even as the tiger unwaveringly continues to praise his Master and all that he has learnt with him. Apart from the fact that he did fight for the independence of India, we do not get much information about the Master’s life. Pousse, however, seems to know the *sadhu* better even than the narrator in the novel. Indeed, no details on his value as a citizen or clerk reach the reader or even Raja. The *sanyasi*’s wife provides some insight on the life that she shared with this “perfect husband” during which, she says,

I have borne your vagaries for a lifetime: your inordinate demands of food and my perpetual anxiety to see you satisfied, and my total surrender night or day when passion seized you and you displayed the indifference of a savage, never caring for my health or inclination, and with your crude jocularities even before the children, I shudder. (170-1)

In another instance, he also agrees to give Raja some information on his former life:

I was a man of the world busy and active and living by the clock, scrutinizing my bank book, greeting and smiling at all and sundry because I was anxious to be treated as a respectable man in society. One day it seemed all wrong, a senseless repetition of activities...and I abruptly shed everything including...clothes, wife, children, home, possessions, all of which seemed intolerable. (161)

The version of the Master does not contradict that of his wife. What drives him to abandon his former life is not satisfaction that he has completed his duties in it and can now move on to a higher state of purity. Raja's depiction of the character is in no way unchallenged despite the impression that we are reading a moralizing fable. In "Changing the Script": R. K. Narayan and Hinduism", Ashok Bery identifies at least two characteristics of the fable in *A Tiger for Malgudi*: the narrator being an animal --which is common in traditional fables-- and the tone being apparently didactic and moralizing (16). Yet he also identifies "elements which suggest problems in the doctrines [that the narrative] appears to uphold" (17). Similarly, Chelva Kanaganayakam remarks that despite the "straightforward fabulist mode, the novel orchestrates situations in order to reflect on issues of violence, nationalism, language, religion, and gender" (34). As both critics suggest, the novel provides the tools to question the kind of principles incarnated and preached by the *sanyasi*. This criticism is made possible through the magic realist feature that allows the tiger to narrate the story. Interestingly, the questioning of some

features of Hindu philosophy does not serve as a rejection of the non-rational aspect of reality. Even though the character of the master and his sainthood are questioned, he still is a magic realist figure and not an imposter as is the case in *The Guide*. The magic powers of the Master do not confer upon him the status of perfection. Similarly, the notion of *Karma*, for instance, is overwhelmingly present in the novel, but certainly not unquestioned as Bery argues. He sees the anxiety related to *Karma* and the whole idea of fate in the novel metaphorically “disturbing the official moral of the narrative” (17).

Even as a hermit, the Master does not really conform to the expectations of the people from a *sanyasi*. Unlike Raju, who despite his imposture accepts to play this role by counseling, helping, and encouraging education among the members of the community, the Master here longs for solitude so that when some people come to see him he is almost irritated: “No escape from Humanity! They’ll pursue you even if you hide in the bowels of the Earth” (162). In other instances, the Master himself voices the criticism directed at the people’s approach to religion and sainthood. When they tell him “we are small men, but you are great”, he debunks the idea of sainthood attached to his appearance: “How? Because I’m unshaven and shirtless? I don’t shave because I find it easier not to. I don’t wear a shirt because I don’t have one...I am no different from you and no need to pay homage to me...You must prostrate only before God” (164). The Master does have the power to converse with a tiger, tame it and transform its soul. We are indebted to him for the narrative that Raja can now share thanks to the transformation that enables the animal to “think, analyze, judge, remember” (12). Nevertheless, despite the magic that the man can work, it is not only his behavior in his former life that is questioned. His sense of

responsibility is questioned when his wife manages to find him. He refuses to acknowledge his identity and refers to himself in the third person. He does not understand his wife's plight and replies by arguing that "the surrender was rather on his part...please know that he left home not out of wrath...but out of an inner transformation" (171). Nonetheless, the emphasis in this passage is not so much on his determination and the greatness of his sacrifice in relinquishing material wealth and family for moral elevation but on the misery of his family resulting from his act. When she sees that her visit has been fruitless, "[s]he broke down and wailed aloud. He calmly watched her". In the light of the woman's description of their life together where she stresses his indifference and selfishness, his renunciation can be interpreted not as a sacrifice but as a continuation of his characteristic selfishness and individualistic search for well-being.

The *sanyasi* is a motif in much of Narayan's work. In *The Guide*, the fake *sanyasi* chooses the life of a hermit to escape the humiliation he will certainly face if he returns to Malgudi. In *A Tiger for Malgudi*, despite the different context and the *sadhu's* "actual" existing powers, the idea that his drive was to escape from the burden of family, possession, and society is not implausible either. Thus, the function of the character is in itself ambivalent, as he projects a critical look on some of the religious practices of people, while at times displaying a questionable behavior.

In a traditional fable the magic (usually mythological) component comes to sustain the philosophy described and is used to account for the order of things in the world. The

fantastic is thus in harmony with the reality of the world. In magic realism, by contrast, the magic is presented as part of the reality but not as a perfect, harmonious world. It is in itself a strategy to show the cracks in any hegemonic discourse given the existence of different alternative worlds. This text illustrates this idea as the magic narrative of Raja is used to undermine itself and destabilize the account that reaches the reader from the perspective of the unquestioning narrator.

Even though the tiger reminisces fondly about the man who saved him from panic-stricken people who wanted him killed, the eventual state in which Raja has to finish his life is another element that “disturb[s] the official moral of the narrative” to use Ashok Bery’s expression. Indeed, the man liberates the tiger only to place him in a cage again; he teaches him that he is no animal only to force him to live in a zoo where children throw stones at him. Despite the Raja’s unwavering devotion to his Master, the author’s dubiousness emerges throughout the narrative. Even as he lies in the cage of the zoo because of him, all that Raja can do is “madly hope that my Master might suddenly appear out of the crowd...I keep scrutinizing faces, but all faces are dull and monotonous, none radiant like my Master’s” (11). The tiger insists on showing that his Master did not treat him as an animal, but instead of releasing the tiger, Master decides to entrust him to a local zoo where he has to face people’s impossibility to see beyond his appearance, call him “a ferocious beast, and make crude noises to rouse [him], fling a stone if the keeper is not looking” (11). The pathetic state in which the once proud tiger has to await his death, though, forces the reader to question such a decision to seal the destiny of Raja in this way. His end would have been no different had he been able to stay on in the circus

till he was too old to perform. So was the encounter with the Master and the ensuing spiritual awakening really beneficial for the tiger? Clearly the text is not meant to support Raja's perception of his Master as a saint; rather, it keeps drawing attention to the ambivalent behavior of the "*sadhu*". This ambivalence is characteristic of the novel as a whole. Indeed, the questions raised do not express a wish to do away with Hinduism altogether, as different Hindu principles still hold a central function in the narrative. As Bery concludes, "although Hinduism is indispensable to [Narayan], it is not unchallengeable" (19-20).

The message is not homogeneous or one-sided in the fabulist fashion. Magic realism functions through its destabilizing effect without positing either realism or magic as representing the whole truth. Magic realism, being a hybrid form bringing modern reality to bear on an alternative magic world and vice versa, usually endows the novel with a certain distance to criticize both and not to take either for granted. It is this dialogic distance that distinguishes *A Tiger for Malgudi* from a traditional fable in spite of its non-realist stance. A similar critical function is explored, though to a lesser degree, in *The English Teacher* where here again the emphasis is on the coexistence of the world of magic and the world of modern reality rather than the establishment of a hierarchical relation.

In his analysis of the author's use of myth, Michel Pousse argues that "[t]raditional Hindu myths are given fresh life as if to prove that there is nothing really new in the modern world. Narayan definitely concentrates on a changing society faced with an increasing

westernization which it is difficult to resist” (21). Hindu myths are given fresh life in the three novels discussed in this chapter since they are integrated in contemporary narratives and modern India, but they are not left unquestioned, however sacred and ancestral they are. If in *The Guide* this is achieved in the realist mode, in *The English Teacher* and *A Tiger for Malgudi*, Hinduism and Indian society are presented through a magic realist strategy that also serves as a tool for criticism. Narayan seems at the same time to look at the modern world through a mythical lens, and to bring a critical, contemporary stance to bear on Hinduism, not to move beyond it but to present a dynamic, adaptable image of it. However different from the magic realist style of writers that emerged later, Narayan’s style presents features that qualify some of his novels to be analyzed from a magic realist perspective. This early form of magic realism that was not really informed by current criticism on the trend helps understand the mode as an attitude towards reality that fosters a relativist and multifaceted approach to the world. This relativism will continue to be a pivotal element in the magic realist work of later writers especially as it has often been paired with postmodernism.

Magic realism as political commentary: Salman Rushdie's *Midnight's Children*, *Shame*, and *The Moor's Last Sigh*

The publication of *Midnight's Children* and *Shame* was contiguous with an increase in theorization of magic realism and an increase in the circulation of the term in the description of postcolonial works. The debate concerning its political efficacy had been sparked in the sixties and seventies with the Latin American prolific production of magic realist works. The grafting of the mode to the postcolonial project on this basis was confirmed especially with Stephen Slemon's essay "Magic Realism as a Postcolonial Discourse" (1988). However, the magic realist approach to reality and fiction also ushered strong opposition focusing on what was perceived as the escapist nature of the trend. Realism has often been viewed as the appropriate genre to entrench literature in social and political critique by contrast to romanticism or modernism. According to this perspective, the introduction of magic within a realistic context would not only undermine realism but also blur its ideological entailments and effectiveness. Salman Rushdie, among others, has often been charged with displaying an interest in political and social critique only to trivialize or mask it with the use of magic realism and the sense of the grotesque that goes along with it in his oeuvre in particular. Do Rushdie's novels present only token resistance, to use Laura Moss' argument, and can that be attributed to his use of magic realism? In other words, is it magic realism that neutralizes any potential form of political or social commentary in the novels?

Midnight's Children (hereafter *Midnight*), *Shame*, and *The Moor's Last Sigh* (hereafter *Moor*) all illustrate a different use of magic realism. In Rushdie's oeuvre, magic realism

is fully deployed to serve resistance and criticism. Given that realism has often been the vehicle for political commitment in literary texts, the invocation of magic is sometimes associated with traditional mythical writing. In this sense, mythical writing is viewed in total contrast to realism, being allegedly a-historical, in its focus on a mythical account of the creation of the world to the detriment of the rational explanation. As Fawzia Afzal-Khan points out, the revival of mythology played an important role in terms of resistance to the colonizer's exclusively rationalized and rationalizing approach to people and their creed (23-4). While its importance in relation to tradition and reassertion of identity is recognized, this return to the mythical past, says Afzal-Khan, implies petrification of history and the impossibility of addressing the pending issues of a postcolonial society in the twentieth century, hence the problematic use of this genre in contemporary postcolonial writing. In her analysis of Salman Rushdie, for instance, (in terms of genre and ideology), Afzal-Khan contrasts the presence of magic to that of realism in the novels, hence continuously foregrounding the opposition between the implied escapism and political involvement. Yet, as I will argue, the very implication of magic realism is that both the magic and realistic worlds co-exist simultaneously and function as a metaphor for the idea of multiplicity to foster a multi-layered perspective of truth and history with reference to recent Indian and Pakistani political and social history. In this sense, magic realism does not neutralize the political dimension of the novel; rather it is through the trend that the opposition to political and social hegemonic powers is achieved. In *Midnight*, for instance, out of a magic realistic tale emerge Rushdie's comments on history conceived as one, truthful, rational and mainly mythologized construct at the hands of the post-independence Indian leadership. A similar focus with

reference to Pakistan marks *Shame* where magic realism with a postmodernist stance is instrumental in denouncing the dictatorial and patriarchal stranglehold in the country. In *Moor*, by contrast to what has been suggested, magic realism is not discarded; it emerges with a variation: it is not as pervasive as in the previous two novels, but is active in unveiling the manipulation of religious identity within a nationalistic discourse for the sake of a monolithic power.

Midnight (1980) revolves around the history of post-independence India seen through the eyes of Saleem Sinai, who starts by telling the story of his grandparents. Saleem is born at the exact time India becomes independent and is endowed, together with the other children of midnight, with magical powers. A parallelism between the personal history of the narrator and that of his country marks the whole novel. Magic and references to ancient myth structure the narrative, yet instead of freezing it in a mythical past they are firmly entrenched in the contemporary history of the region. Events such as the nationalist propaganda, the Emergency declared by Indira Gandhi, the civil war in Pakistan etc. are all recounted through the magic realist lens. Most importantly, it is the magic realist dimension that is instrumental in Rushdie's deconstruction of history as a monolithic, factual, reliable body of knowledge and denunciation of Indian political figures' attempt to appropriate truth so as to serve their interests.

For Indian writers who opt for magic realism, the mode becomes not only a manner to present their own versions of the (ex)colonized world but also to refute any hegemonic account (whether emanating from the colonizer or in a post-independence context from

the nationalist leaders). In an interview with Jean-Pierre Durix, Rushdie explains that “*Midnight’s Children* was partly conceived as an opportunity to break away from the manner in which India has been written about in English” (cited in Kanaganayakam, 171). The Orientalist project was built around the systematic binary categorization of the world into colonizer and colonized. Accounts of India as well as other colonies relied on the genre of realism and were thus presented as truthful, regardless of their being constructed. Magic realism, however, with its inherent relativist stance, upholds the view that no one version of history can actually present the whole picture. In this sense, magic realist style does have ideological implications for an Indian novelist writing in English. If the novel is the dialogic space that Mikhail Bakhtin describes, then magic realism with the mixture of genres, cultures and, ideologies fully explores this space through clashes and negotiations between the trends. Magic realism digs into different sources of inspiration, recognizes various dimensions of reality and thus becomes a statement in favor of a positive perception of hybridity. In this trend, the rational and the irrational do not annihilate each other, nor do they fill separate spaces. The magic events, when they occur, do not signal the withdrawal from history into mythology or the fantastic, but provide a more critical look at events.

In *Midnight*, the co-existence of multiple realities within the same space, therefore, becomes a metaphor for the multi-faceted aspect of history, and provides the propitious ground for Rushdie to present sharp criticism of the political life in the country which culminates in the denunciation of the abuses of the Gandhian regime in the Seventies. The very co-existence of myth and magic on the one hand and Indian history on the other

forms the main argument against the charge of escapism in *Midnight*. Not only do they co-exist, but it is precisely through the lens of magic realism that the writer deconstructs the historical events recounted in the novel in order to foreground alternative tales that all partake in the formation of the history of India. Saleem very soon realizes the presence of another secret world that excludes his family and friends and is shared by the other children born with the independence of the country. His *Midnight's Children* Congress allows him to be aware of the multitudinous realities that people India. Despite the secrecy of this world, it is not severed from the real world given that the other children do not spring from the imagination of the child: they do exist (and two of them play an important role in his life as he meets them later on: Parvati and Shiva). Thus, Saleem's magic skills do not force a withdrawal into fantasy. As a matter of fact, the ten-year old, middle-class boy discovers various aspects of the reality of his country precisely through his powers. What he calls "mind-hopping" allows him to "invade" people's mind all over the territory:

At one time I was a landlord in Uttar Pradesh, my belly rolling over my pajama-cord as I ordered serfs to set my surplus grain on fire...at another moment I was starving to death in Orissa where there was food shortage as usual...I occupied, briefly, the mind of a congress party worker, bribing a village schoolteacher to throw his weight behind the party of Gandhi and Nehru in the coming election campaign. (198)

Young Saleem discovers the discrepancy in the experiences of the multitudes peopling the country through a magic realist device. Thanks to "mind hopping", the narrator has

the opportunity to touch on a variety of social and political issues besides the major themes and characters of the novel. In the above passage, Saleem discovers the economic and social system that relies on and fuels the huge social gap, while the political leaders of the nation's government resort to bribery to ensure power. Such digressions form another alternative space where other characters briefly gain existence in the novel. In this way, even though a great number of characters occupy peripheral spaces in *Midnight*, still they constantly draw attention to their existence, and add to the social and political criticism at the core of *Midnight*.

Despite the different digressions that characterize the style, the focus is on the opposition of Saleem's narrative --and his version of events-- to the hegemonic writing of history here represented and promoted by the government of Indira Gandhi. The denunciation of the practices of the Indian government during the Emergency is rendered through magic realism, which highlights not only the injustices of the regime but also the manipulation of facts through nationalist discourse whereby abuse of power is masked as a measure for the sake of the population. During the Emergency that lasted from 1974 to 1977, oppressive measures and suspension of certain rights were thus declared in the name of the nation. In Rushdie's fictionalization of those events, the criticism of the national discourse of the regime is promoted through the magic realist multi-layering of perspectives, whereby no narrative is declared immune from the trappings of language, or, in the case of Saleem, of memory.

The critical stance vis-à-vis the subjectivity underlying all narratives is most effectively achieved through the mistakes that pepper the narrator's version and draw attention to its inherent fallacies as another subjective narrative. Some negative reactions to the novel stemmed from a misunderstanding of Rushdie's deliberate inclusion of mistakes at the level of historical events. In an article entitled "Imaginary Homelands 'Errata' The Riddle of Midnight", Salman Rushdie refers to this criticism and replies that "[m]y India was just that, 'my' India, a version and no more than one version of all the hundreds of millions of possible versions. I tried to make it as imaginatively true as I could, but imaginative truth is simultaneously true and suspect" (10). In the novel as well as in this quotation Rushdie consciously subjects historical facts to what he calls "imaginative truth". These "mistakes" do not result from Rushdie's being more interested in developing the magic aspect of the novel to the detriment of the "realist" side; they are meant to disrupt the world of facts and the pretense of accuracy in the realm of history. Saleem's narrative, by exhibiting its own fallacies, also becomes a comment on what he perceives as the Widow's megalomaniac attempt to be at the center of the country and its history. Here, the perspective of the narrator completely takes over the narrative. Saleem happens to be at *the center* of some of the major events that occur not only in India but also Pakistan and Bangladesh. Even the narrator starts questioning the accuracy of what he is "recording" in writing (for posterity):

Rereading my work, I have discovered an error in chronology. The assassination of Mahatma Gandhi occurs, in these pages, on the wrong date. But I cannot say, now, what the actual sequence of events might have been; in my India, Gandhi

will continue to die at the wrong time...Does one error invalidate the entire fabric? Am I so far gone, in my desperate need for meaning, that I am prepared to distort everything –to rewrite the whole history of my times purely in order to place myself in a central role? (190)

While exposing the despotism of the Widow, Saleem (unwittingly first) performs part of what he accuses her of: both of them hijack the history of the people to place themselves at the center of events. He is now aware of the mistakes that he has recorded but despite his efforts, “[his] memory refuses, stubbornly, to alter the sequence of events” (254). The line between the rational world and the magical one is blurred to the point that the two become inseparable; likewise, here history, memory, and imagination are all shown to contribute to the writing of Saleem’s narrative. Thus, this text constantly provides the reader with clues as to the unreliability of the narrator. It casts doubts upon other versions of truth while allowing Saleem to give a personal, hence openly subjective, interpretation of the events that take place in the region. This wariness of the claim that one account could be infallible prepares the ground for the central deconstruction of Indira Gandhi’s constructed image and discourse in parallel to her abuses of the nation and people.

The destabilization of the monolithic notion of history entailed by magic realism is intertwined with the particular criticism of Indira Gandhi. This is partly achieved through the evocation of mythology, whereby Gandhi is compared to a mythical figure. The argument of escapism employed against magic realism often revolves around the

presence of mythology and questions the effectiveness of the world of myth in dealing with contemporary issues. When concern with recent history is more associated with the realist trend, then history and mythology are expected to be set in opposition. Afzal-Khan, for example, insists that in *Midnight*, while history is critiqued and the official discourse of the Gandhi regime undermined, myth is similarly debunked and hence not offered as an ideological alternative:

By disappointing the reader who is led to expect a truly magical, mythological reunion of the children of midnight, Rushdie is in a sense using myth to debunk itself. Clearly myth is an inadequate response, so Rushdie seems to be asserting, to the very complex reality of postcolonial independence. (158)

In this reading, myth is indeed expected to be severed from the world of facts ruled by the government, and the reader is disappointed that the children's magical congress does not function magically as a "solution" to the "reality of postcolonial independence". I would argue, however, that in the magic realist work, myth and history do not exist in respective and separate spheres. Afzal-Khan overlooks the fact that even though myth is used to debunk a monolithic, hegemonic history, mythology is not set in opposition to history according to a classical binary classification: History/Myth. The classical rational assumption of the superiority of history is deconstructed but not reversed in that myth does not replace it.

A closer look at the narrative reveals that the formation of history itself becomes a process of myth-making. The comparison is indeed obvious as historical personages,

here namely Indira Gandhi, attempt to attain the sacredness inspired by mythical figures. The narrator clearly insists on the Prime Minister's constructing her image so as to represent the figure of the "Mother Goddess" (*Midnight*, 504). The slogan "India is Indira and Indira is India" (483) underlines the Widow's totalitarian attempt to homogenize the country under one image (tightly linked to her own) and thus claim the legendary power of mythical deities. This mythologizing reaches a climax when Saleem conflates the figures of the Widow and the "Mother Goddess". He, indeed, describes the actions of the leader as an act of betrayal of a mother towards her children, thus reiterating the symbolism of motherhood and mythical power that she has constructed. It is clear that while associations are established between characters in the novel and figures from Hindu mythology (Shiva, for instance, shares a great power of destruction with the mythological god of the same name), the role of mythology goes beyond the mere recognition of its symbolic function in relation to Indian identity. It is actively deployed beyond the remote world of myth to encompass the more immediate realm of history and expose the manipulation of facts in the construction of a supposedly authoritative and homogenizing version of history. As the narrator says, "[the] Prime Minister of India...aspired to be Devi, the Mother Goddess...those who would be gods fear no one so much as the other potential deities" (504). Thirst for absolute supremacy drives the Widow to annihilate any alternative sources of power. The children of midnight, "the other potential deities", with their magic gift have the ability to create a parallel, albeit magic, space of dialogue and potential action that she perceives as a serious threat to her construction of a monolithic mythical power. The Widow wants to strengthen her grip on history by evoking images of myth.

Michael Gorra recognizes the generic multiplicity at work in *Midnight* and (unlike Afzal-Khan) celebrates the interaction rather than opposition of the different components (realism, myth, magic). Be that as it may, he wonders how effective criticism can be when it is rendered through what he calls “fantasy”. His question is symptomatic of the general association of political involvement with literature via realism. The magic realist connotations of resistance and the reassertion of a postcolonial perspective do not remove the questioning of how *effective* besides innovative a magic realist rendering of reality would be. After analyzing the ideological gesture in the novel that ties in to Bakhtin’s concept of heteroglossia, Gorra interrogates what he perceives as the pitfall of the style that Rushdie uses, and the potential gap between the world of fantasy and the brutal injustice to which Saleem is, representatively, subjected. Gorra comments that

[b]oth the fantasy and the rhetorical extravagance of *Midnight’s Children* can numb its readers to anything but its own saffron-and-green exhilaration. However entrancing -indeed precisely because it is entrancing- Rushdie’s style distances one from the horrors it describes, making his description of them not only bearable but even enjoyable; it keeps one from being disturbed by the things that happen to his characters even by Saleem’s treatment at the hands of the Widow. (Gorra, 145)

For Gorra, the novel eludes the real brutality of the situation through “fantasy”. According to this interpretation, the scenes of war that Saleem describes, or his account of torture and vasectomy to which he is subjected are told in such an esthetic way that the

reader's attention is distracted from the horror. The enjoyable aspect of the novel makes the brutal acts just another opportunity for the narrator to display his narrative skills. Nevertheless, it is undeniable that "fantasy" or magic is not the only way a fiction can be embellished so as to draw the attention of the reader to the stylistic play rather to the detriment of the theme. Behind Gorra's criticism is the assumption that a realistic novel can hardly be elusive given its transparency and faithful rendering of reality. It is precisely the assumption that one text could be realistic enough to capture the pain, injustice *etc.* that is contested through the use of magic realism. A realistic novel could obviously be elusive or openly activist but the picture presented can only be truncated. After all, wasn't a certain image of India (the Orient, and the colonized world in general) constructed with the help of the realistic Victorian novel? The postcolonial wariness of the realistic style is represented in Rushdie's novel through the questioning of history. Estheticism is not exclusive to magic realism, nor does magic realism intrinsically imply escapism.

A similar relativism marks *Shame* where Rushdie displays a different use of magic realism and pairs it with more postmodernist play by foregrounding the multiple layers of the narrative. The postmodernist component is made to work with magic realism in the denunciation of hegemony in Pakistan, but also in the formation of any hegemonic system of discourse and power, history being a major illustration. Three years after *Midnight*, Rushdie again decides to rely on magic realism in a novel where he renders his social and political critique of Pakistan. Furthermore, magic realism in *Shame* resists the charge of escapism, for it reasserts the idea that magic is not equated with withdrawal:

magic realist elements in the novel are entangled with the characters' life and converge towards the condemnation of patriarchal and despotic domination.

In *Midnight* the focus is mainly on Saleem's subjective "autobiography" and his personal rendering of the political life in India and Pakistan; in *Shame* (1983), the narrator, who is what Jenny Sharpe calls "author-in-the-text", includes gossip, speculations, and his own perceptions; thus multiplying the sources of information and positing an openly interpretative text. Even though the narrator starts claiming that his narrative is pure fiction, his caricatures of Pakistani political figures are hardly masked. Rushdie is "overtly" reenacting the political rivalry between Raza Hyder, standing for Zia Ul-Haq, a military and political leader, and Iskander Harappa, representing Zulfikar Ali Bhutto, prime minister ousted and executed in 1978 by Ul-Haq who was then president. The narrator focuses on the lust for power of the different male protagonists, and the largely (stereotypically) oppressed female characters, mostly wives and daughters of the fictionalized versions of the above political figures. The rivalry between the characters is at the center of the social and political critique in the novel, as patriarchy and dictatorship converge in the characters' fight for absolute power. Shame becomes a metaphor for the innumerable acts of injustice sanctioned by a patriarchal and totalitarian system so that their perpetrators feel and express no shame. The beast in Sufiya Zinobia, Raza's "retarded" daughter, feeds on this unfelt shame and transforms it in sheer and blind violence, assaulting and killing indiscriminately. The novel ends in turmoil, as Sufiya's transformation becomes a comment on the society and the political life in Pakistan.

The obvious correspondence between the fictional world of the novel and the actual situation of Pakistan makes it clear that the magic realist nature of the text does not imply dodging the political and social concerns in Pakistan. The text counters the claim that magic realism shuns contemporary issues. The referential value of magic realism is asserted stylistically --mainly through the narrator's often self-reflexive incursions-- and thematically through the character of Sufiya Zinobia. The apparently fabulist style that starts the novel is systematically deconstructed. Even though the narrator calls the novel "a modern fairy tale", the comment is evidently not to be taken for granted. It is significant, for instance, that the reader is first led to believe that the historical context is remote. The narrator, however, quickly contextualizes the tale:

All this happened in the fourteenth century. I'm using the Hegiran calendar, naturally: don't imagine that stories of this type always take place longlong ago [*sic*]. Time cannot be homogenized like milk, and in those parts, until quite recently, the thirteenth hundreds were still in full swing. (13)

This is one strategy that Rushdie uses to denounce what he sees as obsolete and fruitless practices in the country. The deconstruction of the fabulist tone that firmly entrenches the novel in twentieth century reality is also a comment with reference to magic realism itself. Indeed, the assumption that the fantastic within the real can only imply petrification in the past and escapism is here subverted by the contemporary context and the recognizable characters/caricatures. Besides, it effectively fosters the idea of multiple perspectives and confronts the readers with their own assumptions. The fact that the time

scale is presented according to the Hegiran rather than the Gregorian calendar highlights the relativism inherent to our perception of reality, which is constantly reasserted implicitly in the novel through the magic realist component.

The foregrounding of the magic realist perspective is also partly achieved through the postmodern element. I shall focus on the incursions of the author-in-the-text, whereby the political critique is attained through the magic realist and postmodern dimension. Yet, as the reaction of some critics suggests, the magic realist and the multi-layered style in which the story is rendered raises concerns about the effectiveness of this “political” novel. For instance, in “Salman Rushdie’s *Shame*: Postmodern Migrancy and the Representation of Women”, Aijaz Ahmad develops the argument that any resistance attributed to *Shame* is nullified by the ambiguous politics of a novel caught between a postmodern dialectic of migrancy on the one hand, and its contextual and historical referentiality on the other. The political dimension, he argues, “is precluded for [Rushdie] by the very (post)modernist location he chooses for himself and by the extent to which he valorizes the experience of ‘migrancy’ and unbelonging” (152). According to Ahmad, the postmodern component with its generic multiplicity neutralizes the anti-establishment project of *Shame*.

The postmodern nature of the text, however, notwithstanding the theme of migrancy, is not incompatible with the contextual specificity of criticism. Postmodernism functions with magic realism in denouncing social and political practices depicted in *Shame*. In other words, the narrator’s reiteration of the trope of migrancy and his ambiguous

position as one who has discovered the country only “in slices” (*Shame*, 69) actually feeds into the magic realist (and postmodern) wariness of his own discourse and narrative. By so doing he fosters his criticism of the nationalist, political, and religious unity and uniformity that are used as a pretext by the characters to ensure hegemony. The narrator indeed insists on his situation as an exile and plays on the idea of location:

The country in this story is not Pakistan, or not quite. There are two countries, real and fictional, occupying the same space, or almost the same space. My story, my fictional country exist, like myself, at a slight angle of reality. I have found this off-centering to be necessary; but its value is, of course, open to debate. (29)

This “off-centering” is nevertheless very close to the “center”, the fact that the fictional and the real countries do not annihilate one another is a firm statement that the story is not utter fiction: it intrinsically refers to reality (given that both “occupy the same space”). By being “at a slight angle of reality”, the story, the country, and the narrator are systematically part of that reality. The narrator refuses to establish two distinguishable worlds, and the following statement only increases the haziness promoted in the above quote: “I have not given the country a name. And Q. is not Quetta at all. But I don’t want to be precious about this: when I arrive at the big city I shall call it Karachi” (29). Obviously, the message here is that no statement is to be completely trusted. Magic realism and postmodernism function in tandem as a metaphor for the constructedness of homogenizing discourse presented as stable and truthful. The notion of “migrancy” with its entailed versatility counters the “cage” effect, to use Ahmad’s word (139), created by the political and social oppression in the novel. It is obviously

clear that this country *is* Pakistan, but that it is also Rushdie's self-consciously truncated rendering of Pakistan.

Rather than occluding the political dimension of the novel, the self-deconstruction associated with the fragmentation of the position of the narrator is exploited to expose the abuses within the country. From the beginning, the narrator casts doubt upon his own narrative, and intentionally elaborates on the aporiatic moments of the text thus referring back to the necessarily flawed nature of the official discourses constructed to disguise abuses. He, for instance, anticipates reactions to his version of the story and momentarily assumes the position of potential opponents questioning his tale, for he is the "[o]utsider! Trespasser!...We reject your authority...what can you tell but lies?"(28). Nevertheless, he continues his narrative while constantly reminding the reader that he has learned Pakistan "in slices" (69). Again, the relativity fostered by magic realism forestalls the attempt to assert the supremacy of any discourse in particular or either component of magic realism (namely magic or realism). Yet this is a double-edged sword: while a watchdog against essentialism, this position could also be interpreted as a shield against accountability. This issue is directly addressed in the novel. Some readers criticize *Midnight* for what they perceive as lack of historical accuracy, so here the narrator ironically refers to *Shame* being all but a realistic novel, for "Realism can break a writer's heart", and claims that with this non-referential novel "nobody need get upset, or take anything I say too seriously. No drastic action need be taken either...what a relief" (70). This is his ironic way to refer to the "realistic" value of his text in relation to the actual

political and social situation. The narrator devotes more than a page to the list of things that a realist novel would include. But, he insists, he will *not* write

about the issue of *Time* magazine that never got into the country because it carried an article about president Ayoub Khan's alleged Swiss bank account;...or about genocide in Baluchistan....or about the extra hangings --the first for twenty years-- that were ordered purely to legitimize the execution of Mister Zulfikar Ali Bhutto.

(70)

In this passage (which is not the only such instance in *Shame*), references to the events and some of the political figures involved are unequivocal. Besides the pleasurable effect of the postmodern gesture to expose the inherently deceptive nature of language, or of the magic realist insistence on relativism, Rushdie is firmly establishing his criticism of the reality existing in Pakistan.

Magic realism is not only functional at the level of style through the narrator's comments on the writing of the story; it is also inherent to the criticism of the patriarchal system and the political despotism through the story and specifically through the marginal character of Sufiya. The novel focuses on "[the unfelt shame that] is siphoned off by the misfortunate few, janitors of the unseen...Nor do we think much of them, although they clean up our dirty waters" (122). Sufiya is presented as one such character. The innocuous girl --to whom nobody pays attention before the first outburst of violence-- stores images and words in her head, and captures the sense of shame and guilt that others should, but refuse to feel. The marginal space in which Sufiya exists is also the

place where excluded feelings converge and are processed into anger and violence. The accumulation of these feelings which stands for the accumulation of tension around her stir the beast in her and transform her into the indiscriminate avenger that terrifies the population. Sufiya, despite her frail body, develops supernatural strength and roams the country, hypnotizing her victims and wrenching their heads with her bare hands. This magic realist transformation, however monstrous, provides an oppositional space that functions as an alternative to the strict system to which most characters, especially female, are confined.

Sufiya is in this sense another example of “unbelonging” and comes at the center of a magic realist space that provides a critical outlook on the patriarchal system by which she is confronted from the day of her birth. Sufiya is associated with magic realism the moment she is born to disappointed parents who were expecting a son. Raza Hyder, her father and future president of the country, refuses what is unquestionable and wants to argue that the newborn is a son and not a daughter, whereupon the baby, the narrator tells us, blushes for his shame (89-90). The symbolic blushing, a materialization of the fleeting feeling of shame that she can catch, becomes a habit in the child and is even carried further precisely in a magic realistic way. Her blushing is so intense that she burns the lips of the Hyders’ matriarch when the latter kisses her (121). The disappointment of her parents only increases when she has fever that damages her brain permanently. Her gender, together with her physical and mental state, place her “at a slight angle of [the] reality” that surrounds her. The particular marginal state in which she exists, however, is more subject to that reality than anybody realizes. She is acutely

aware of the shame of others and of herself being the shame of her mother, first for not being a son, and then for being the opposite of her sister who seems to subscribe to a classical model of her gender dictated by society.

The role of magic realism in the character of Sufiya goes beyond this incidental unnatural blushing; likewise, the grotesque is not limited to the comic effect. Aijaz Ahmad, however, is dubious of the implications of magic realism:

The governing metaphor...--the Beast emerging from inside the Beauty, while the Beauty herself is anything but beautiful in any conventional sense-- is again superbly within the tradition of the Grotesque, and the political idea which is inscribed within this metaphor --a woman's inherent right to be not a doll but a fighter-- is equally powerful. One's sense of unease comes, however, from the irrational and spurious powering which Sufiya's violences accumulate and from what she herself *becomes* (a destroyer of men, fields, animals; a four-legged beast). (147)

In this interpretation, the effect of resistance represented by the "governing metaphor" is thus lost when the grotesque becomes too "irrational", and when the symbol of a beast materializes through random violent actions. Ahmad insists on the humor-effect, and instances of the grotesque, but does not seem to take the magical aspect seriously. As Jenny Sharpe comments in "The Limits of What is Possible: Reimagining *Sharam* in Salman Rushdie's *Shame*", "since [Ahmad] considers social realism alone to be adequate to the task of representing popular struggles, Ahmad fails to engage the imaginative

realities of *Shame* in a meaningful way” (2). Jenny Sharpe is right in recognizing the potentialities offered by the imaginary dimension of the narrative:

The fantastic elements of her character demonstrate how monstrous women’s shame is to look at, if only it were something that could be seen. Through Sufiya Zinobia, Rushdie introduces the imaginative possibility of women’s shame producing anger and self-pride rather than embarrassment and family honor. By creating a magical character that plays with the gendering of *izzat* [honor] and *sharam* [shame], he breaks down the taken-for-grantedness of female modesty.

(2)

Sharpe, nonetheless, also notes the absence in the text of the possibility for resistance *within* the traditional society as represented in *Shame*. For instance, most female characters are represented as totally passive including Sufiya who does not control the Beast and passively accepts the transformation of shame into anger within herself (Grewal cited in Sharpe 2-3). Inderpal Grewal thus concludes that the novel is not liberating because it focuses on oppression and not on the women’s struggle (2). Rushdie’s account does indeed focus exclusively on oppression while depriving his characters of the possibility for resistance within this society. However, this is not to be attributed to the use of magic realism. Rushdie, beyond the requirements of the mode, chooses the claustrophobic atmosphere and constructs it carefully throughout the novel. If the magic is fully used in the anti-establishment project, thus providing discourses that undermine the official one, the reader will indeed not be offered a solution, nor one functional character that can effect fruitful action. Thus it is true that *Shame* initiates a

denunciatory project and falls short of producing other than totally flawed characters and representation of society. The only character who does transform her shame into anger is Sufiya, who is unaware of the rampant beast that grows in her and orchestrates the killing expeditions. In other words, the imaginary aspect of the novel does provide alternatives to the discourse of a homogeneous patriarchal society, but the decision not to endow the (mainly female) characters with the potential to actively resist in a constructive rather than destructive way remains a choice that Rushdie makes regardless of the magic realist style. Again, it is not magic realism per se that entails inefficacy.

Besides the symbolic destabilization of the gendering of “*izzat*” and “*sharam*” through the transformation of Sufiya, her actions are also deployed in a way that contributes to the criticism of the society. However monstrous or grotesque she becomes, the reader does not lose the sense that this allegorization is not a simple esthetic fantasy within the text but is created and fuelled by the unexpressed feelings of shame that Sufiya secretly witnesses. Her violence *crescendos* till she becomes the “destroyer of fields, men, animals; a four-legged beast” that provokes panic across the nation. Her -or the beast’s deeds- however, become a comment on and a reaction to the events that happen around her and cause shame. The slaughter of the turkeys, for instance, is not devoid of meaning, if unexpected. The narrator, attempting to account for the first act of violence, suggests that “twelve years of unloved humiliation take their toll, even on an idiot” (138). This situation renders her extremely sensitive to any excess of shame. In this episode, the turkeys are linked to their owner, Pinkie Aurangzeb (now the Hyders’ neighbor) who is the woman that first sparks the rivalry between Iskander and Raza. Being aware of the

story, Bilquis, Raza's wife, takes the presence of the turkeys as "a personal insult" (134) and expresses her anger in the presence of both daughters whereupon, we are told "[h]er elder daughter, the mental case, began to blush, *because* it was evident that the gobbling turkeys did indeed represent one more victory of Pinkie Aurangzeb over other men's wives [*italics added*]" (135). The narrator links the girl's blushing to the reason that causes her mother to feel humiliated: Pinkie and her turkeys. The following day marks the first violent outburst in the twelve-year old girl as she slaughters Pinkie's two hundred and eighty turkeys, thus in a way fulfilling her mother's wish to see the birds disappear. The event represents the child's discovery of "the path that links *sharam* [shame] to violence" (139). The marginal state in which she exists becomes the space from which the beast acts onto her surroundings. Her state and bestial action are entangled with her position as a female who cannot rebel against her situation. The only alternative that Rushdie creates for her is a magic realist world where rationality yields to violence.

The violence expressed by the marginal figure of Sufiya is not simply a reaction and alternative to a patriarchal system that eventually crushes most female characters of the novel; there is also a parallelism between her increasing violence and the degradation of the political situation. This parallelism is made clear as the political life is largely embodied by her father who is the president of the country when she starts killing people. The sharpest political critique is deployed in the depiction of Raza's dogged ambition to acquire power and keep it. Here again the magic realist aspect in the text is not severed from the political criticism, and the link with the political oppression and dictatorship is

not lost on the reader, who is constantly reminded that Sufiya's beast feeds on what takes place around her. One example is when Sufiya escapes the drugged detention by her husband and father. This flight coincides with the execution of Iskander Harappa, the rival and relative that her father has kept in detention for two years (239). After Colonel Shuja shoots Iskander in his death-cell, the narrator comments simply "the Beast has many faces" (238). Sufiya's beast, therefore, becomes an exaggerated continuation of an already existing violence and injustice in the nation, part of which is effectively endorsed by her father. Raza is tightening his grip on the country and trying to draw legitimacy for his acts from religious fundamentalism. His power seems absolute and he has just put down a coup when his daughter "re-enter[s] his life" (250). In this phase of his presidency, Raza relies on the rhetoric of faith "which the people are reluctant to see discredited, disenfranchised, mocked" (251). Religious discourse thus proves a useful tool for Raza to silence any opposition whose claims or acts are easily discarded on pretext that they are "ungodly". The element of unrest and chaos that does not come within the stranglehold of the president is Sufiya, who at this point has become a terrifying living legend all over Pakistan. The parallelism between political oppression and her beastly crimes is reiterated in the scene that marks the fall of the president. As an angry crowd gathers at the palace gates, Omar imagines the arrival of Sufiya and "the people allowing her through, *their champion*, to do their dirty work: *their Beast* with her fiery eyes [*italics added*]" (261-2). After the presidential family escapes from the crowd, Sufiya momentarily disappears "as if her hunger had been satisfied; or as though she had never been more than a rumor, a chimaera, the collective fantasy of a stifled people, a dream born of their rage" (263). Sufiya, who has always lived at the periphery of her

family and society, represents an alternative space that feeds on the rage of an oppressed society. Even though Sufiya's violence strikes arbitrarily, her irrational anger now refers to the rage of a politically stifled population.

The beast, however, is not content with the fall of the Hyders and stalks the fugitives to their hideout in Nishapur where, after killing Omar, Sufiya's body disappears in an explosion (286). Sufiya Zinobia, a mere vessel for the beast, thus becomes the ultimate victim of the still growing shame. Patriarchal oppression and political repression thus converge in the fantastic transformation of Sufiya and her yielding to the monster that inhabits her. In this sense, magic realism is intertwined with the denunciatory objective of both *Midnight* and *Shame*.

In *Moor* (1995), the presence of magic realism is rather peripheral in comparison to its role in the two novels previously discussed. This particularity has been interpreted as the author's growing distrust in the mode. Nonetheless, as I will argue in this section, magic realism in this novel is neither discarded, nor limited to, an esthetic element. It effectively partakes in Rushdie's criticism of the lust for power in modern India to the detriment of plurality; in other words, magic realism here again contributes to the political dimension of the novel. The narrator --and main character-- writes the story of his family, starting with the generation of his great-grandparents. The commerce of spices which makes the family's fortune and around which different feuds are fought continues to be the monopoly of the family in the late eighties. That is when the narrator also becomes the main character. As Moraes grows to discover the manipulations and

power struggles in his own family, he also witnesses the “war” among the different clans of Bombay. The evolution of the characters is set against a background of growing religious intolerance in India that culminates in the destruction of the Babri Masjid in Ayodhya in 1992. Corruption, trafficking, political manipulation, and the appropriation of religious discourse as a political tool thus become central themes in the novel.

Moor presents magic realistic instances but not in the same way or abundance as in either *Shame* or *Midnight*, which leads Laura Moss to see in *Moor* the “magic realists’ last sigh”. I argue in the previous sections that magic realism is not incompatible with political and/or social criticism but can be used as a device to achieve it. It follows that the reduced presence of the trend in *Moor* does not make the novel more political than the other two. Laura Moss, however, interprets such a change at the level of the use of magic realism in this sense. In “‘Forget those damnfool realists!’ Salman Rushdie’s Self-Parody as the Magic Realists ‘Last Sigh’”, she argues that *Moor* is a parody of *Midnight* and of magic realism in general. By 1998, when her essay was published, “magic realism” had been so widely used that, Moss declares, “Rushdie’s patience with the heightened predictability of the literary conventions of magic realism and its critical reception could be growing thin” (121). The way *Moor* is constructed, she argues, is the evidence of Rushdie’s attempt to distance his writing from magic realism:

In this mock-epic the protagonist requests his own deflation...Rushdie’s self-parody is firmly entrenched as he indicates that extraordinariness is not always the site of strength. Such a mockery of difference also adds to Rushdie’s underlying

critique of the proponents of magic realism who envision the form to be politically imbricated as he himself did. (131)

According to this reading, through the deflation of extraordinariness, Rushdie is closer to reality with a clearly referential hence more effective criticism of the political and corporate world of post-independence second-generation Bombay. In other words, Moss associates the parody of magic realism and the minimal presence of it in *Moor* with a growing political involvement in the text. Besides, she insists, “magic realism cannot be viewed as a counterpoint to pessimism in the novel when the extraordinary is so thoroughly destroyed in the text” (132). For Moss, then, magic realism can be a viable form of criticism only if it represents a solution to the problems exposed or some sort of denouement. Given the bleak outcome of the novel with the transformation of Bombay into a battlefield between its different communities, Moss concludes that magic realism is here evoked only to be parodied.

Although magic realism in this novel is not as pervasive as it is in *Shame* and *Midnight*, the text does not support the argument that the writer is discarding the genre and pointing to its inefficacy when it comes to political commitment. The claim is undermined by the fact that magic realism here again contributes to the political awareness and involvement in the narrative. The implication that in *Midnight* “extraordinariness” is equated with heroism is not supported by the text. Despite the extraordinary, albeit short, life of Saleem Sinai, he is constructed as an anti-hero. His magical powers are revealed to him as he is hidden in the washing-chest and his nose “gave way to a pajama-cord and was possessed by a cataclysmic -a world altering- an irreversible *sniff*...nose-goo [is] floating

upwards...until something bursts”, and the sounds of the other children invade his head (184). It is impossible to overlook the irony deployed in this far from grand and heroic entry into the world of magic. Saleem tries to use this magic bond with the other children and initiates a democratic M.C.C. but is soon overwhelmed by the situation and is snubbed by most members of his congress. He is a man whose destiny is linked to that of the nation and who is rarely in a position to take decisions for himself. His magical powers do not save him nor can they be used to save his family. Literally and metaphorically impotent, this “hero” is in no way a reverse of what Moraes is. Parody of heroism starts in *Midnight* and is further explored in *Moor*. In this sense, both novels are mock-epics.

In *Moor*, magic realist instances are not directly linked to the particular events that expose corruption and the wars for power. In other words, the character does not discover these realities through a magic realist perspective. However, magic realism is fundamental in denouncing the manipulation of the notions of identity and nationalism, which is one of the tools used by the leading (and competing) figures of Bombay. Thus, despite its peripheral presence, the metaphorical role of the form is still functional in the novel. In *Midnight*, for instance, Saleem’s magical powers allow him to learn about the social and political situations of the country and communicate them to the reader. In *Moor*, magic realism does not function in exactly the same way but the intertwining of alternative realities (magic and real; irrational and rational) casts doubts on the authenticity of the world of facts, hence the metaphorical role of magic realism in *Moor*. A case in point is when Aurora, Moraes’ mother, wishes for a child who would grow

faster than usual. The fancy of Aurora, however personal, eventually gives birth, as it were, to magic that is now apparent (and perplexing) to everyone: the last child of the couple is extraordinarily big and grows fast enough for him to have a mustache at the age of eight. We are told that Moraes dutifully obeys his mother's wish and emerges four months and a half after his "alleged" conception. Nine months prior to his birth, though, the narrator points out that Aurora goes to Delhi and meets "her good friend the Prime Minister [Jawaharlal Nehru]" (175). If conceived nine months earlier, as "logically" one would tend to believe, then this story is given a magical dimension so that it becomes socially acceptable. Everybody seems to accept it as a fact that Moraes was conceived four and a half months before his birth; moreover, the lie acquires concrete existence as the baby himself accepts the curse and does indeed magically speed out of his mother's womb and through life. The day "Baby Gargantua Zogoibi drew his first breath..., his physical development was already so advanced that --a generous erection serving somewhat to impede his passage down the birth canal-- that nobody in their right mind would have thought of calling him half-formed" (144). This disorder allows him to grow "a fully waxed-pointy-tipped moustache" at the age of eight (189) and makes his body seventy when his actual age is thirty-five (339). What starts as Aurora's personal wish - an attempt to cover up her affair with the Prime Minister- becomes magic in the sense that now it is there for everybody to see, and believe. To put it differently, what starts as fantasy is transformed into, and accepted as a fact.

In a way, Aurora's irrational wish that comes true becomes a reference for the way facts are created and history constructed so as to fit into the political plans of the different

rivals in the story. This theme, which is a recurrent concern in the other two novels, is also an important element in *Moor* and is mostly explored through magic realism. A key passage illustrating this function of magic realism is the narrator's account of the destruction of the Babri Masjid in 1992 by Hindu fundamentalists claiming that the mosque was built on the site of Lord Rama's birth. Zeenat Vakil, curator at the Zogoiby Bequest Gallery, expresses her opinion on the destruction of the mosque and the ensuing turmoil that seizes the country: "I blame fiction...The followers of one fiction knock down another popular piece of make-believe, and Bingo! It's war" (351). Vakil's opinion captures the spirit with which the novel is written and puts the event as well as Raman Fielding's Hindu nationalist discourse into perspective. Her interpretation is a hint as to the position of the narrator vis-à-vis the events that he recounts. He emphasizes the idea of perspectives as he tells us that "'fanatics' or alternatively 'devout liberators of the sacred site' (delete according to taste) swarmed over the seventeenth-century Babri Masjid and tore it apart with their bare hands" (363). He adopts the same tone when he describes the retaliation of "'justly enraged Muslims' / 'fanatical killers' (once again use your blue pencil as your heart dictates) [who] smashed up Hindu temples and killed Hindus" (365). Interestingly, the event and the contending claims are further put under scrutiny as Moraes points out that the mosque preexisted the tradition considering the site Rama's birthplace (365) and that the two communities apparently shared the site "without fuss" at first (363).

The focus on multi-perspectives promoted by the magic realist dimension of the text prepares the ground for the narrator to expose the manipulation of reality at work in the

eighties and early nineties in Bombay that gives rise to the violence described above. The phenomenon that leads to the escalation of violence at that particular time is mainly explored through the discourse of Raman Fielding, one of the founders of the “Mumbai’s Axis” -the Party of Hindu Nationalists. The narrator describes the transformation of Bombay -celebrated as the site of hybridity in *Midnight-* into a battleground for different “gangs” resorting to exclusionary religious and political discourses for the sole purpose of securing power. Moraes unwillingly ends up at the center of the fight for power and thus witnesses the fabrication of facts used to support the claim of religious authenticity and link it to Indian identity. After losing the support of his family, Moraes is saved from the dreary conditions of detention in “Bombay Central” by Raman Fielding, a leader of the Hindu Nationalist movement who conflates India and “*Hindu-stan*: the country of Hindus” (295). Fielding hires the protagonist to be part of the team working for him whose task is to terrorize dissidents and annihilate what he calls the Scar-Zogoiby axis that stands for Jewish and Moslem minorities “gang[ing] together against Hindus” (295). While claiming to foster the Hindu cause and protect Hindus from other communities, Fielding does not hesitate to hire Moraes, a non-Hindu. Fielding associates nationalism with religious identity and authenticity, but behind the nationalist discourse that he and other communities try to graft to a manipulated or truncated account of the history of India, Rushdie depicts a world where all the parties negotiate this token authenticity. One instance among many others is when Fielding accepts to cancel a march organized by his movement in protest to Aurora’s painting in exchange for her money (233). The site of multiplicity which Moss identifies as magic realism provides, notwithstanding the pessimism represented by the bombings of Bombay, the undermining element in the tale

that exposes this manipulation of facts. The eventual failure of the argument of diversity occurs precisely because the different communities lust for total hegemony and refuse to leave any space for alternative groups of power. Here it is not the idea that magic realism could be resistant that is discarded. What is exposed is the flagrant “buffoonery” of the hegemonic, homogeneous discourse. Therefore, the destruction of the site of multiplicity in *Moor*, as Moss says, does not result from Rushdie’s growing suspicion of magic realism. What brings about utter disarray in Bombay is the different political “gangs” seizing upon the discourse of authenticity and transforming “poses, attitudes, shams” into facts (*Moor*, 340). Just before Moraes leaves India, lovesick Samy Hazaré attacks various spots in the city with his homemade bombs and annihilates, among others, the leaders of the different gangs. This destruction becomes a metaphor for the corruption and the growing intolerance infesting Bombay thus threatening to destroy the city and what the author sees as the multicultural spirit that characterizes it.

The desolate outcome for Bombay and for most characters in the novel is not symptomatic of Rushdie growing impatient or dubious about the ability of magic realism to assert an anti-establishment stance. Rather, it is his way to express what he perceives as a depressing (and worsening) reality in India (and Pakistan in *Shame*) because of the creeping corruption and religious intolerance. In *Moor*, the proliferation of corruption, political intrigues and gang wars results in the transformation of Bombay into a war zone. Such a bleak outcome, however, is not a new feature in Rushdie’s writing. The same pattern exists in *Shame* which is marked by a chaotic explosion at the end and does not offer any sense of hope. While *Moor* is not the most magic realist novel by Rushdie, here

magic realism functions metaphorically to destabilize essentialist fixed notions of identity be it religious, or nationalist. Its reduced role in this novel does not result in an “increased politicization”, as Moss says, or in stronger resistance. As shown in the previous sections of this chapter, the other novels are not any less oppositional than *Moor*. By presenting a different use of magic realism in *Moor*, Rushdie subverts attempts to give the genre a fixed identity and reasserts what has already been established in the other novels: that magic realism does not entail escapism, but rather becomes a pivotal element in the denunciation of the despotism entangled with nationalism in *Midnight*, or patriarchy and dictatorship in *Shame*, and the anti-pluralistic drives exposed in *Moor*.

“Strategic Exoticism” through magic realism in Arundhati Roy’s *The God of Small Things*

As stated in the previous chapter, Rushdie’s writing and growing fame coincided with the increasing interest in magic realism as it was expanding beyond the Latin American sphere. Many young writers in Latin America and elsewhere have tended to explore the mode, imitating their predecessors who gained much fame through it. For many of them magic realism became the strategy to increase their chances to be published. In the previous chapter, I focus on the criticism that the mode fosters escapism. Furthermore, critics reject what they see as the inherently essentialist claim that magic realism would be more appropriate to express the reality of the postcolonial world, given the possibility to validate (ancient) beliefs and the irrational and make them active in contemporary postcolonial societies. For them, magic realist writers capitalize on exotic images of the culture and people described. The idea that the reality of the cultures described is to be conveyed through magic is interpreted as a disguised recycling of exotic images meant to appeal to a Western audience. It is undeniable that the mode could be used in that sense, but not necessarily. Exoticism, like escapism, is not inherent in any one trend in particular and could also characterize a realistic novel. One of the features of the magic realist style is that it destabilizes the primacy of rationalism, the oneness of truth or history without suggesting that another vision hinging on mythical accounts is to replace it. Magic is used as a comment on the limits of exclusively rational accounts, establishing their hegemony through the claim that they are realistic. Be that as it may, magic realism, in the view of many critics, had become the new strategy to market the postcolonial world. For some, it was a Western invention used to reprocess exotic

images encoding the Other and maintaining the line separating the Western and non-Western thought.

In the Nineties, some Latin American writers openly spoke against the trend, stating that it was no longer adequate to express a contemporary reality (I shall return to this shortly). Reviewers and critics such as Pankaj Mishra started seeing a similar implicit tendency to discard magic realism in Roy's *The God of Small Things* (1997). Mishra, the editor who first discovered Roy's novel, comments on the perception of the trend by Indian novelists writing in English:

Magic realism was very popular with the writers who came immediately after Rushdie [...] but the same writers have turned away from it. I think it is because of the inherent unsatisfactoriness of the form, the way in which its formulas further confuse and complicate an already confused and complicated reality.
(cited in Rothstein, 2)

Roy, whose novel does not reproduce Rushdie's style where magic realism is omnipresent, has thus been hailed as an author who represents the frustration of Indian writers with the overuse of magic realism and what some see as its exotic overtones. I will show that Roy's narrative does indeed represent a change but certainly not a break with the magic realist mode. Despite the reduced presence of the trend in *The God of Small Things*, the way magic realism is deployed continues to foster the relativism associated with the magic realist perspective. Any exoticist expectations of the reader

regarding the specific magic realist instances are countered. Indeed the magic when it occurs is not directly linked to identifiably Indian cultural features. In fact, the exotic potential of a magic realist novel is deflected, as the evocation of cultural aspects harking back to Orientalist literature through mythology, for instance, are used as a critique of the Orientalist agenda thus forestalling an exoticist reading of the novel. For instance, Roy dwells extensively on the Kathakali dance, a passage that could be read as exotic. Yet, the exotic appeal that such a dance could have, or usually has in Orientalist fiction, is consistently subverted. As the narrator tells us, it is “low season for Kathakali” but the dancers are not simply performing a ritualistic dance, “[t]hey danced to jettison their humiliation. Their swimming-pool performances. Their turning to tourism to stave off starvation” (218). Their tattered costumes (220) only confirm a social and economic reality that the text will not occlude in spite of the potentially exotic content of the passage. The exotic here is subverted but not altogether rejected. I will read the presence of the magic realist attitude (rather than full-fledged movement) in the light of Graham Huggan’s notion of strategic exoticism, by which he means the exploitation of exotic images by postcolonial writers in order to subvert them.

Much has been said about exoticism in relation to the postcolonial field in general. The field itself was criticized for capitalizing on the exotic aspect of the postcolonial world. In the same way, postcolonial magic realist writers have had to face the same kind of criticism. It is undeniable that the term quickly gained a marketable potential and was exploited as the new medium in which the “Other” would be presented to the world. Rebelling against the alleged exoticism of the genre, eighteen Latin American authors

contributed to an anthology, entitled *McOndo*, meant to celebrate realism. The anthology published in Santiago, Chile in 1996 (Margolis, 2) represents the writers' stance against the law of the market that forced a Latino novel to conform to the magic realist criterion in order to sell on an international level. Through the anthology, the authors of *McOndo* reject what they perceive as the Latin American addiction to magic realism in literature and present an urban, modern world steeped in pop culture.

Through *McOndo*, writers such as the Chilean Alberto Fuguet or Bolivian writer Paz Soldán are clearly expressing their irritation with magic realism and what they see as its potentially exoticizing implications. They foreground what Mac Margolis calls "the new Latin American fiction verité" (2) to depict a Latin American world of "Mc Donald's, Macintosh computers, and condos" (all of which form the word *McOndo*, an obvious allusion to Gabriel García Márquez's fictional town Macondo). Alberto Fuguet, who is considered the outspoken leader of this movement, explains his position in a short article entitled explicitly enough "I am not a magic realist". He explains that "[w]riters today who mold themselves after the Latin American 'boom' writers after the 1960's [...] have transformed fiction into the fairy-tale business, cranking out shamelessly folkloric novels that cater to the imagination of politically correct readers" (5). The feeling that the conditions which produced the "boom" are outdated is shared by Fuguet's fellow-McOndonians who also believe that magic realism has contributed to the consolidation of the exotic image of Latin America depicted through a mostly rural setting steeped in superstition and ancient rituals.

Fuguet argues that the region has moved beyond the early collectivistic drives of the sixties and seventies: "I feel that the great literary theme of Latin American identity (who are we?) must now take a back seat to the theme of personal identity (who am I?). The McOndo writers...base their stories on individual lives, instead of collective epics" (5). In other words, magic realism is seen as inadequate for approaching present-day Latin American urban societies where the individual is no longer concerned about collective national identity. Therefore, the continued production of magic realist novels, according to Fuguet, simply amounts to the desire to secure marketability through sheer unrepresentative exoticism.

No counterpart to the McOndo phenomenon appeared among Indian novelists writing in English, but a similar attitude vis-à-vis the trend has been expressed in the last years. Dissatisfaction with the apparently exoticizing aspect in magic realism has led some critics (such as Mishra) to emphasize the need to move away from the mode and turn to social realism. Many reviewers commenting on Arundhati Roy's novel list her among the new writers who distinguish themselves by moving away from the magic realism practiced by Rushdie- the Indian writer to whom she is most often compared. Mervyn Rothstein, for instance, in "India's Post-Rushdie Generation: Young Writers Leave Magic Realism and Look at Reality", introduces Roy as part of the new generation of Indian writers who have broken with magic realism and are "ushering in a new era for Indian literature in English" (1).

According to the opponents of the genre, Roy's novel illustrates a concrete break with the mode. It is true that *The God of Small Things* is not a "magic realist" novel the way *Shame* and *Midnight* inarguably are. I want to argue, however, that *The God of Small Things* does not represent the break described above. Nor can it be charged with yielding to exoticism through magic realism for easy success. It is undeniable that magic realism is not the most outstanding feature in the novel, but the text still provides a magic realist space that does play a particular role more than it has been acknowledged.

The God of Small Things was published in 1997 to much critical acclaim. The story is set within the Syrian Christian community in Ayemenem, a rural town in the southern Indian state of Kerala. The narrative opens with Rahel returning from Washington to the family house in Ayemenem to see her twin brother Estha after twenty three years of separation. The novel then unfolds along two temporal trajectories, the second being before the separation, when the twins are seven-years old. After divorcing their father, their mother --Ammu-- takes them back to live with her in her parents' house. The characters evolve in a complex social organization of the community which is mainly unveiled when the family discovers the intercommunity affair between Ammu and the "Untouchable" Velutha (even though both families are Christian). On the following day, the body of their cousin Sophie Mol, their uncle Chacko's daughter, journeying in India with her English mother, is recovered from the river. Baby Kochamma, their grandaunt, manages to link the two events by accusing Velutha of having abducted the child and caused her death. The outcome is devastating for Ammu and her twins. After Velutha's brutal murder by the police, she is forced to send Estha to his father, leave Rahel behind, and

move out of the house. Her death soon follows, before the three of them ever get a chance of being reunited. The twins who are described as having “joint identities” (5) that defy the long separation meet again in Ayemenem twenty three years later.

Magic realism in *The God of Small Things* is not as widely explored as in *Midnight*, but its presence and role do not go unnoticed. The novel is often compared to *Midnight*, but here the story of the characters does not function as an allegory for that of the nation. Yet the novel is replete with references to the social and political life of the region and the workings of history. The characters evolve in a social space ruled by a hierarchical system where castes and religion often form the basis for the way people are to behave socially and interact with one another. The emphasis is on the arbitrariness of the rules to which the society has to conform. The twins, for instance, do not have the right to visit Velutha’s house, even though the man has worked for the family since his childhood. Various references are also made to the colonial history of the country through the figure of Kari Saipu or the Anglophilia of the Ipe family. Both this past --in which the family appears as a representative of the continuing bourgeois power during and after the Raj-- as well as ancient social divisions are described against a backdrop of Marxist activities in the state of Kerala. These various themes do not become the main focus but all contribute to the overall complex (or as some critics would put it postmodern) fabric of the narrative. It is fair to say that reality and history are presented as constructed and relative, and that magic realism contributes to the expression of this relativity even if it is not the sole strategy used to that end.

Several instances of magic realism characterize the relationship of the twins during their childhood as well as after their reunion as adults. The most magic realist feature that has a sustained presence and role in the novel is the twins' telepathy, an obvious consequence of their joint identities. As an adult, Rahel still "has a memory of waking up one night giggling at Estha's funny dream...She remembers the taste of the tomato sandwiches -- *Estha's* sandwiches, that *Estha* ate-- on the Madras Mail to Madras" (5). These instances underlie the relationship of the twins to one another and sometimes mediate their perception of the world around them. The telepathy continues even as the children are separated. When they part, instead of the disruption of their joint identities, we are given a hint that the oneness will survive distance. As the train that carries Estha away from his mother and sister starts moving, he calls his mother one last time, "Estha's voice lifted into a wail...He left his voice behind. On the station platform Rahel doubled over and screamed and screamed" (309). At this point in the novel we already know that Estha will grow increasingly quiet till he stops speaking altogether. He, in other words, leaves his voice behind. Rahel, complementing him as usual, catches the voice and takes up her brother's wail. The twins are only capable of sharing their grief with one another when they meet again twenty three years later. If Arundhati Roy does not seem to use the strategy of magic realism in the particular instances where the social, political, and historical realities of the region are evoked, the trend is definitely present in the way the twins relate to each other and to those particular realities which have a direct impact on their lives.

As stated earlier, writers who make use of magic realism are sometimes interpreted as simply trying to capitalize on the exotic appeal of magic to guarantee success beyond the national market. In *The Postcolonial Exotic*, Graham Huggan attempts to unveil the workings of the exotic in the realm of postcolonial literature circulating in the West. The exotic is initially, as Tzvetan Todorov explains, the glorification of the other while keeping him at bay, this distance being the prerequisite to preserve the exotic (unfamiliar) aspect:

The exotic novel glorifies foreigners, while the colonial novel denigrates them. But the contradiction is only apparent. Once the author has declared that he alone is the only subject...and that the others have been reduced to objects, it is...of secondary concern whether those objects are loved or despised. The essential point is that they are not full-fledged human beings. (cited in Huggan, 184)

Here what Todorov describes is the Western novelist projecting his/her gaze on the non-Western "Other". At the outset, the "exotic" is a euro-centric notion, given the assumption that the exotic is always used to describe the non-Western and presented as such to the Western audience. The exotic was thus first used to construct the image of the "Other" from a Western perspective. By contrast, when the author and the characters represented belong to the same cultural landscape as in most postcolonial literature, there needs to be a rethinking of the very idea of the exotic. Here the drive underlying an exotic representation is not an embedded self-aggrandizement of the person who is holding the pen. In the case of the postcolonial author, what is at stake is the power of the exotic on the audience.

Suspicion vis-à-vis the exoticizing potential of magic realism, for instance, is obviously related to its reception and marketability mainly in the Western world. Jean-Pierre Durix clearly links both aspects:

magic realism represents a form of cultural assertion and a reaction to what was perceived as the dominant discourse. Yet, paradoxically, [...] the works classified in this category found an outlet mainly in the old metropolises. One may wonder whether the writers' awareness of this factor tainted their conception of the fictional reality they represented. (116)

What Durix suggests here is that if the authors were not acutely aware of the demand for, and hence marketability of, the genre, their interest in magic realism might not have been so keen. Nonetheless, there is another aspect to this link between the trend and the demand of the audience for it. The postcolonial author is usually aware of his/her readership, whether actually recycling the "exotic" image for the sake of Western readers or signifying upon it to rehabilitate the once-exoticized people. Therefore, the debate over the question of exoticism in magic realism proves more complex as the exotic itself can be used subversively by the postcolonial author, as is the case in this novel. If magic realism becomes a tool for self-assertion, and if it can be used strategically to that end, then the postcolonial writer is making use of the avidity of the West for the exotic to subvert the exoticizing perception, while at the same time foregrounding a different image.

The notion of exoticism is thus complicated by the possibility to transform the exotic into a strategy to combat stereotypes. In *The Postcolonial Exotic*, Huggan deals extensively with the marketing forces behind postcolonial literature and the exotic as a marketing strategy. Huggan introduces the notion of “strategic exoticism”. Simply put, the exotic stereotypes first used by Western discourse to codify and fix the “Other” can be recuperated by the postcolonial writer who can subvert them while asserting a certain cultural particularity. Huggan thus defines

‘strategic exoticism’: the means through which postcolonial writers/thinkers, working from within exoticist codes of representation, either manage to subvert those codes [...] or succeed in redeploying them for the purposes of uncovering differential relations of power. (32)

The above approach to exoticism is still problematic in the sense that it is not easy to draw the line between sheer or strategic exoticism, or to achieve successful strategic exoticism. Indeed, such a strategy also entails the sustained circulation of exotic images of the non-Western world. Be that as it may, and in contrast to the perception of some critics, magic realism is used by Roy and can be read as strategic exoticism deployed to expose “differential relations of power” exposed in the novel through the social and historical structure of the society.

In an essay on Roy, Victor Ramraj argues that Indian literature in English is moving beyond the postcolonial focus in themes and approach. He insists that *The God of Small Things* “depicts a contemporary India that could be encompassed satisfactorily by

postmodern rather than postcolonial theorizing” (153). A strict postcolonial approach to the novel, Ramraj says, would ignore India’s “multiple communal selves” represented in the story (157). Within this postmodern multiplicity, however, the particular postcolonial aspect does exist and interacts with the other facets that form the identity of the characters. Fuguet insists on the need to tackle the question “who am I?” through realistic style, thus stating that the communal question of identity largely expressed through magic realism (“who are we?”) is obsolete. Roy’s text, however, itself provides a clue for a reading of the novel where the particular and the general, or the two questions that Fuguet states above, are both raised in the text. One passage is explicit about the dual concern in the novel. Clearly enough the main themes are woven around the personal story of the characters but the text insists

that [in Rahel’s country] *personal* despair could never be desperate enough. That something happened when personal despair dropped by at the wayside shrine of the vast, violent, circling, driving, ridiculous, insane, unfeasible public turmoil of a nation. That Big God howled like a hot wind, and demanded obeisance. Then Small God...came away cauterized...Inured by the confirmation of his own inconsequence, he became truly indifferent. (20)

Even though the novel is about “Small God”, or the individual destinies of Estha, Rahel, and Ammu, issues related to identity, colonial and pre-colonial history also form part of the novel. While at the level of content magic realism seems to be limited to the world of Small God related to the twins and not to the more general questions, the implications of

magic realism (such as relativism) do intervene in the way larger issues are dealt with. The way the magic realist form is exploited here can be read as one of the strategies through which exotic themes and images can be subverted without being discarded altogether. There are two ways in which magic realism can be read as strategic exoticism in the novel. First, magic realist instances are directly tied to the world of the twins rather than to the particular episodes where history and the “public turmoil of a nation” are evoked. Secondly, despite this particularity where the magic seems to be personal (rather than communal), the world of “Big God” and its bullying power now can be viewed in the light of magic realism. Both these aspects of the use of magic realism thus counter the readers’ expectations of how magic realism should operate (in a postcolonial work).

Before analyzing the impact of the metaphorical role of the mode on the narrative as a whole, I will first examine the way specific magic realist instances operate at the level of content in the light of strategic exoticism. A particularly effective illustration of strategic exoticism is the reiteration of the Kurtz-image largely through parody. In this example, where Roy is referring back to a tradition in the colonial novel, magic does not seem to be foremost. The Kurtz episode is located suggestively enough in the History House. The History House, where Kari Saipu lived, has a central position in Ayemenem and a symbolic role in the novel. This is where Ammu and Velutha meet at night and where the children witness the brutal bludgeoning of their mother’s lover. It also becomes a metaphor for history. When Chacko uses the metaphor of an old house to explain the notion of history to the twins, they immediately picture it as the abandoned house across

the river. Thus, references to specific history or universal history converge in the symbol of the History House which used to belong to Kari Saipu, the “Englishman who had ‘gone native’. Who spoke Malayalam and wore Mundus. Ayemenem’s own Kurtz. Ayemenem his private Heart of Darkness” (51). In colonial literature, the image of the European reverting to a primitive state in a “primitive” setting was quite common, which is symptomatic of the colonizer’s fear of becoming indistinguishable from the colonized, hence the need to construct a firm psychological divide between the two (Loomba, 136). One of the causes and at the same time means to achieve this exacerbated schism is the intense exoticization of the “Other”. Kurtz in Joseph Conrad’s *The Heart of Darkness* is probably the classical figure of the kind. Roy reinstates this colonial, exoticizing leitmotif through the figure of Kari Saipu. By giving the phenomenon a name --Kurtz (“Ayemenem’s own Kurtz”)-- Roy is not only confronting the exotic overtones of the image and what it encodes , but also satirizing the character and the whole situation. He is a lonely, indeed exotic figure to the people of Ayemenem. The fact of “going native” is parodied and presented as a Western eccentricity and certainly not as a phenomenon encouraged by the population or provoked by the setting. If the Kurtz phenomenon is the way writers dramatized the Western fear of the primal urge to revert to a “primitive” state, the idea is here subverted and reversed: the man in his eccentricity renders the local population rather wary of him and of his ghost after his death. The exotic in this example is itself used “derisively” as Huggan says (77).

Like the Kurtz-phenomenon, it is possible to analyze instances of magic realism in this novel in the light of Huggan’s notion of “strategic exoticism”. Again, the concern of

some opponents of the trend is that the author risks exoticizing the postcolonial culture or individual by associating them with the irrational and the paranormal, or what Liam Connell defines as the implied “residual belief in myth, magic, and the use of ritual” (95). The debate about an alleged exoticism in magic realism arises from the fact that the “magic” is often attributed to the postcolonial (or rather pre-colonial) culture whereas the realistic part in the hybrid mix of magic realism is assumed to be the result of Western influence. It follows that rationality is deemed to be exclusively Western. The issue is much more complex than that. Indeed, in most cases magic and realism are too intertwined to be dissociated along cultural lines, the only clear thing being that this is a hybrid genre where different traditions are tapped, but it is beyond the scope of this chapter to focus on the fallacy of this idea. For the purpose of my argument here, it suffices to say that in this case, the kind of magic realism used in Roy disrupts such a definition of the trend. The specific magic realist instances in the novel do not necessarily focus on aspects of Indian culture or postcolonialism in general. Magic, as stated above, is not apparent in the episode on Kari Saipu.

The particularity of this illustration of magic realism is that it does not spring from the surroundings of the children (the way Sufiya Zinobia’s violence grows as a result and comment on the events that happen around her). The telepathy is linked to their joint identities which are traced back “before life began” (310) when the children were in their mother’s womb. The bond is never broken, and they never really adapt to the rules of their society. During their childhood, they continue to function according to their instinctive perception of the world. An example is their spontaneous search for a

surrogate father and their love for Velutha despite the family's disapproval which clash with the community's man-made rules. Magic realist occurrences, therefore, underscore the opposition between the children's instinctive world and the man-made laws. The narrator opposes the twins' world to the one surrounding them, dominantly adult and arbitrarily oppressing. When they "break" the rule by reading a book backwards, for instance, Miss Mitten, the Australian missionary friend of Baby Kochamma, says that she sees "Satan in their eyes" (58). Their tendency to reinvent the rules and have their own jargon and habits is here perceived as a dangerous potential for disobedience and evil. The magic realist space that they share fuels and is fueled by their marginal state (for being half-Hindu, for having divorced parents, for their magically joint identities).

Their telepathy proves instrumental for them in dealing with the harshness of the world around them. Thus Rahel shares the knowledge and memory of the sexual abuse of her brother by the Orangedrink Lemondrink Man, even though she is not there when it happens. Seeking comfort (and probably unquestioned understanding), Estha walks to his sister's room "and stood quietly outside Rahel's door. Rahel stood on a chair and unlatched the door for him. Chacko did not bother to wonder how she could possibly have known that Estha was at the door. He was used to their sometimes strangeness" (113). Their strangeness, while setting them apart from the rest of the community their entire lives, is the quality from which they draw comfort. Estha is too confused and terrified to tell anybody about what happened, but his sister does not need to hear the story because she already "had in her the sadness of whatever the Orangedrink Lemondrink Man had done to Estha" (110).

Interwoven into the multitude of little events that make up the life of the children is a social critique of the rules that lead to the punishment of the twins, their mother, and Velutha. Magic realism is not the only strategy deployed in the text to denounce the patriarchy and social stratification, but it does contribute to the critique. Indeed, the particularity of their joint identities highlights their somewhat marginal position within the household and the community at large. Their surrounding represents a harsh world that has the power to control the life of the children and their mother, and punish them for not conforming to the social rules. Despite the close relationship that they share with Ammu, Estha and Rahel have been confronted with an inhospitable world since their birth. After Ammu divorces their alcoholic and violent father, they move to Ayemenem where the little family is tolerated rather than welcomed. Nobody can forget that she, a Syrian Christian, married a Hindu and then divorced him. The social pressures and radical positions are mainly represented through Baby Kochamma who

subscribed wholeheartedly to the commonly held view that a married daughter had no position in her parents' home...As for a *divorced* daughter from a *love* marriage, well, words could not describe Baby Kochamma's outrage. As for a *divorced* daughter from an *intercommunity love* marriage --Baby Kochamma chose to remain quiveringly silent on the subject... (45)

The mother's somewhat outcast status is accordingly extended to her children, so "Baby Kochamma disliked the twins...they were Half-Hindu Hybrids whom no self-respecting Syrian Christian would ever marry" (44). The children's telepathy is not described as

springing from the tension around them, but it is rather related to their “joint identities”. Nonetheless, it becomes a tool to resist their hostile environment and support each other. Their jealous grand-aunt is aware of it and “grudged them the comfort they drew from each other” (45). Their relation is so complementary that “Estha and Rahel thought of themselves together as Me, and separately, as We or Us. As though they were a rare breed of Siamese twins, physically separate but with joint identities” (4-5).

Their special bond and the huge loss they have to suffer after the separation and the ensuing death of Ammu give birth to dislocated adult lives. Estha has sunk into utter silence and does not communicate with the surrounding world. Rahel, after a lonely childhood during which she was incapable of adapting to any of the schools she had to attend, seems equally unable to connect with anybody. Like her mother more than twenty-three years before her, she returns to Ayemenem as a divorced woman who had married outside her community. Now Rahel “thinks of Estha and Rahel as *Them*, because, separately, the two of them are no longer what *They* were or ever thought *They’d* be. Their lives have a size and a shape now. Estha has his and Rahel has hers” (5). Despite the separation, Rahel thinks of her brother and herself, not as me and him, but as “Them”. Estranged as they have been, they still form a unit. Baby Kochamma who has always resented their mysterious closeness is the one who, years ago, decided that they would keep only one twin in Ayemenem in an attempt to destroy their powerful union: “Not both. Together they were trouble. *nataS ni rieht seye* [Satan in their eyes]. They had to be separated” (286). After their return, she is delighted to see that “Estha had looked at Rahel and walked straight past her...Like he did with everybody else” (21).

What she does not know is that the twins are communicating in their old telepathic way. Their private space has defeated Baby's attempt to separate them emotionally. In fact, Estha does know that his sister is back. Similarly, as he is out in the rain, Rahel "could feel Estha's rocking, and the wetness of rain on his skin. She could hear the raucous, scrambled world into his head" (22). Again they are marginal in their behavior and lives and are set in opposition to what Baby Kochamma thinks. And again their joint identities seem to be the only space from which they can draw comfort.

It is only with each other that they can recreate their past, resuscitate memories of their mother, and share their grief. Rahel goes to the Kathakali dance and is soon joined by Estha. Even though they go and sit separately, they live the experience together and remember their past jointly. Ironically, the only way they can resuscitate their past and their mother is by breaking the Love Laws like Ammu. Her crime was to overlook the "Love Laws...that lay down who should be loved and how" (33). The twins in turn break the laws through their incestuous relation. This incest is another consequence and symbol of their marginality and the peripheral space in the society which they have been forced to occupy. Their reunion, including this episode, has a cathartic effect: "there were tears...what they shared that night was not happiness but hideous grief" (311). For Estha, the return of his sister unleashes a flood of memories and emotions that he had buried during the years of their separation (16). Both twins, who could not fully realize and understand the tragedy when it occurred or have the possibility to mourn their mother, now do it together as "she and he. We and us" (225). After all these years, the twins again go back to the house unwelcome. And again their telepathy and visceral

relationship is their way to handle their strange existence and come to terms with a cruel destiny.

Magic realism at the level of its specific occurrences is only indirectly linked to what Roy calls the “Big God” themes. This approach to magic realism plays with the expectation that an Indian novelist will necessarily use magic realism in such a way as to foreground a specifically Indian vision of things. This strategy thus effectively undermines the claim that magic realism fosters exoticism by linking magic to a non-Western culture. For example, the world of myth may be characteristic of a great number of magic realist works, but in this novel when mythology is evoked, it is not through a link with magic realism. The chapter entitled “Kochu Thomban” is the only passage where the narrator dwells on Hindu mythology. The adult Rahel and Estha go to the temple to attend a ritualistic Kathakali dance which the dancers insist on performing to “ask pardon of their gods” (218). Interestingly enough, magic realism here does not follow the beaten track. It does not directly affect the dance or the dancers in the above passage. The only magic realist occurrence in this passage is related to the twins’ magic bond. When Rahel goes to the Kathakali, Estha follows her. Before his arrival, “Something altered in the air. And Rahel knew that Estha had come” (222). As far as the magic realist content of the narrative, the use of magic seems to be limited to the private world of the twins, their particular space to which no one –not even Ammu- has access but which becomes for them a resistant space which thus highlights the social pressures to which they have been confronted.

Besides the impact that the magic realist bond of the twins has on their personal life and their relation to their surroundings, magic realism also plays a metaphorical role vis-à-vis the narrative as a whole and the themes that it raises. This function is somewhat similar to the impact of magic realism in Rushdie's *Moor* where the presence of irrational events provides a magic realist perspective that has bearing on the narrator's presentation of reality and facts. In other words, the narrator, by providing a magic realist space, renders any hegemonic discourse suspicious. Even though Roy avoids the possibility of being read as Orientalist given that magic does not occur through myth, for instance, this gesture does not stand for a rejection of issues related to the postcolonial identity of India. Magic realism as stated above still functions as a comment against the binary classification of the world and the inherent subjectivity in the construction of history. The way magic realism is exploited through its presence and metaphorical role plays with the exotic potential of the mode, but is in no way a break with it. It is in this sense that this approach is akin to Huggan's concept of strategic exoticism.

Despite the focus of the text on "Small God", neither the writer nor reader can overlook the world of "Big God", or the context that necessarily impacts on the world of "Small God". In this sense, the theme of history and the history of the region/country make powerful intrusions in the novel. One instance takes place when their uncle Chacko uses the image of a house as a metaphor to explain history: "To understand history", he explains, "we have to go inside and listen to what [our ancestors are] saying" (51). Soon, the children do go inside the History House and watch the policemen, "History's agents", bludgeon Velutha. They witness the arbitrariness of the blind violence unleashed when

“history negotiates its terms and collects its dues” (54). “History” materializes through the actions of the policemen. This murder --for Velutha does not survive-- is instigated by Baby Kochamma who later carefully constructs the story that the twins now have to accept as real in order to save Ammu. As Baby Kochamma gives her version of the story to the inspector accusing Velutha of murder of Sophie Mol and attempted rape on Ammu, “her imagination t[akes] over completely” (246) and she manages to send the police after Velutha, have Ammu leave the house, and separate the twins. This story, however, becomes the official account that destroys four lives: Ammu, Velutha, and the twins. The four have a tendency to break the rules and believe in different standards. As stated earlier, Estha and Rahel’s telepathy sets them apart from the rest of the family --mainly Mammachi, Pappachi, and Baby Kochamma-- and its arbitrary and rigid social codes and emphasizes their marginality. In this passage, a similar opposition is extended to the larger scope of human history.

One of the ways through which Roy uses the mode subversively is that magic realism is only one aspect of the generic multiplicity of the novel. In other words, this is quite different from the McOndonians’ urge to move away from magic realism in order to tackle individualistic rather than collectivistic themes. The overtones of the magic realist style in the postcolonial novel helps foreground the issues related to the construction of history and the complex problems of identity.

By providing the magic realist space which adults cannot access, the text thus exploits the relativism promoted through magic realism and the implications of the magic realist

approach. History is certainly presented in this relativist light. Similarly, the recent colonial history of the Raj and the continuing effects of it in present-day India are put into perspective. Chacko explains to the twins that “Pappachi’s mind had been brought into a state that made him like the English...They were a *family* of Anglophiles. Pointed in the wrong direction, trapped outside their own history” (51). Thus the Anglophile tendency of the Ipe family is both mocked and sustained. While Ammu denigrates her father as a “British CCP...[which] meant shit wiper” (50), when Chacko’s English ex-wife meets the little family, Ammu herself is anxious to exhibit her children’s eloquence in English. Such concerns are quite common in postcolonial literature and Huggan comments on the way intertextuality is exploited in the novel and links it to strategic exoticism:

[*The God of Small Things*] is aware of the recent history of Indo-Anglian fiction, and of the parallel history of imperialist nostalgia in the West...Roy’s novel shows the continuing presence of an imperial imaginary lurking behind Indian literature in English...but this imaginary is turned precisely to commerce, to a currency of nostalgic images, and these images are held up derisively to the very readers they attract. (77)

The novelist also refers to themes common to “Indo-Anglian fiction” and uncovers their workings through strategic exoticism. The magic realist space created in the narrative brings issues related to relativity of truth and history within the scope of the novel. The trend effectively destabilizes the primacy of realism and fosters a relative approach to reality. Therefore, the theme of history as a construct is referred to obliquely (and

metaphorically). Similarly, magic realism as a form may not be the most outstanding feature in the text, yet both aspects are linked and do contribute to the larger picture and implications of the form of the novel which encompasses both realism and magic realism.

The effect of the form of magic realism and the specific instances in the content are obviously linked. Instead of dictating a reading of the novel exclusively from a postcolonial perspective, the magic realist component confirms Victor Ramraj's interpretation of the novel as representative of a postmodern rather than solely postcolonial India. In this sense, the writer as well as the critic point to the multi-faceted aspect of any postcolonial setting. Yet the issues related to the communal history and identity of the country inevitably impinge on the stories of "small things" in a way that provides the particularity of the tale. So the postcolonial writer certainly needs to pay attention to the question of "who am I", but the suggestion of Fuguet that the communal question is obsolete overstates the matter. In this sense, Roy's writing could indeed be seen as a compromise between the two approaches to magic realism; similarly, her novel neither becomes a national allegory, nor merely the representation of an individualistic quest. The specific and the general cohabit like the magic and the real. This peripheral presence of magic realism also represents the concern and play with the notion of the exotic. Like magic realism and partly through it, it is deployed strategically, never excessively. In a way, magic realism here is presented as an attitude towards reality rather than a full-fledged trend.

Conclusion

The appellation of the mode is somewhat misleading in the sense that the magic in magic realism is not introduced as miraculous. First, as different definitions point out, magic events are rarely introduced as unnatural. Instead, they are normalized and integrated in the reality described in the narrative. Second, the magic comes as an alternative space where contending and marginal voices exist and disturb the rational interpretation of reality, and by implication the official political, social, and historical discourses. Yet what might appear as the only space where these voices can be revealed is not always described as salutary in itself. In other words, it is not necessarily presented as a solution.

The magic realist dimension is also subjected to the relativism that it promotes. This critical stance vis-à-vis the magic space itself is clear in *A Tiger for Malgudi*, but is mostly emphasized in later works by Rushdie and Roy. In *A Tiger for Malgudi*, for instance, the final state of the tiger makes the reader suspicious of the subjective perspective of the narrator, Raja. Even though the power of the *sanyasi* is undeniable and the magic state of the tiger is established, we are dubious of how beneficial this transformation has been for Raja. In *Midnight's Children* the magic space that first allows Saleem to communicate and commune with the other children of midnight eventually breaks up totally. Even Saleem's power is completely destroyed by the Widow.

Interestingly enough, in *Shame* and *The God of Small Things* the magic realist space also becomes a site of perversion largely provoked by the surrounding political and social situations. Sufiya's shame, frustration, and isolation generate the monster that hypnotizes four young men and wrenches their heads off after having sex with them. This aspect of magic realism does not neutralize the denunciatory project associated with the mode. Quite the contrary: this perversion is a further criticism of the political and social situations given that Sufiya's extreme violence is presented as a direct consequence of the political, patriarchal, and social oppression to which she is directly or indirectly exposed. In Roy's novel, what starts as the twins' private magic realist relation is reinforced by the hostility by which they are confronted in their surrounding, and their inability to fit in the society and its sometimes arbitrary and strict rules. During their childhood, their joint identities provide them with comfort and mutual understanding. After twenty-three years of solitude and separation, their ultimate attempt to recover their past and express their grief is through incest. Estha and Rahel are aware that they have broken the Love Laws, a breach that their mother had dared years ago and that caused their tragedy. The difference is that the twins are not trying to break the laws out of rebellion at their situation. The narrator insists that "what they shared that night was not happiness but hideous grief" (311). As is the case in *Shame*, this perversion which the twins do not will or plan serves as a further critique of the social rules and people that drive the twins to the periphery of the community. Estha and Rahel are left with nothing except each other. The magic realist alternative becomes a comment on the reality that has excluded certain characters or versions of the story. It destabilizes the hegemonic discourse and at the same time confronts the reader with the consequence of the spirit of uniformity.

Magic realism then presents criticism at different levels by emphasizing the inherently flawed perception of reality as unified. Besides, the magic realist space never becomes the site of perfection and harmony as is often the case in the endings of fables. The multiplicity of spaces claimed by magic realism allow the existence of discourses that will undermine the official one before being destabilized themselves by the relativism inherent to the mode.

For this relativism to be exploited effectively, the narrative itself needs to support the implications of the mode. In other words, the simple inclusion of magic events does not guarantee the critical resistant agenda that operates in the works of the three novelists considered in the thesis. In Chapter III with reference to Rushdie's novels, I contend with the idea of escapism that some critics associate with the mode on the grounds that the concern with history and the postcolonial world in an international political, social, and even cultural space dominated by the Western power or local dictatorships is recurrent in magic realist works. It becomes a problem though when that resistance is taken for granted and when any work including magic realist elements is automatically gauged through the postcolonial criteria. The assumption is that such a work intrinsically presents a political agenda whereby the West and its imperialistic conception of the world are being questioned and/or subverted while the reader is presented with another vision of the world. The expectation of such a militant stance may cloak certain works in more resistance than they actually present.

I have argued that magic realism is an attitude towards reality rather than a fixed genre, and that it is not inherently escapist nor exoticizing especially when exploited through strategic exoticism. Yet this strategy does have a drawback, since the exotic and the myths surrounding the “Other” continue to circulate in the Western world where the ironical tone might be missed, if --that is-- the subversion of “the exoticist modes of representation” (Huggan, 32) is not carried out effectively by the writer. In a context where postcolonialism is necessarily intertwined with postcoloniality, the postcolonial writer has to play this game with the risk of seeing his/her work misused in a way that the exotic would not be the mean to subvert ideas but the end. According to Timothy Brennan, there is a set of postcolonial writers who consciously play the “cosmopolitan” game. The claim of strategic exoticism thus becomes suspicious in some cases. Brennan, author of *At Home in the World: Cosmopolitanism Now* sees cosmopolitanism as a “term [that] has become less an analytical category than a normative projection, complementing at once celebratory claims and despairing recognitions: the death of the nation state, transculturation [...], cultural hybridity [...], and postmodernism” (2). To be part of this cosmopolitan “club” the postcolonial writer has to comply with these cosmopolitan requirements in his/her writing. In other words, the writer is expected to present the features that Brennan defines as being part of the new meaning of cosmopolitanism.

Brennan’s notion of Cosmopolitanism complicates the relation between what Huggan calls postcolonialism and postcoloniality. Indeed, the successful postcolonial writer is often perceived as the one who plays by the rules of postcoloniality by sacrificing

postcolonialism or exploiting the marketable aspect of it. Magic realism, given its association with the field of postcolonialism, and its play on magic, myth, and hybridity is even more subject to inquiry when it comes to the issue of Cosmopolitanism. These suspicions definitely contribute to the growing suspicion towards magic realism in the critical field. However, as is clear from Arundhati Roy's novel, the magic realist spirit is likely to persist.

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